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TOM IS SUMMONED BY WELLINGTON

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1914

With Wellington in Spain

A Story of the Peninsula

BY

CAPTAIN F. S. BRERETON

Author of "The Great Airship" "Kidnapped by Moors"
"A Boy of the Dominion" "The Hero of Panama" &c.

ILLUSTRATED BY W. RAINEY, R.I.

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WITH WELLINGTON IN SPAIN

CHAPTER I

Septimus John Clifford & Son

No cooler spot could be imagined on the hottest midsummer day than the picturesque forecourt of the premises occupied by Septimus John Clifford & Son, wine merchants, importers and exporters.

Behind the forecourt, crowding the latter closely towards the edge of the River Thames, some few hundred yards below the point where the stream swept and swirled through the arches of the bridge, stretched an irregular block of buildings, that portion farthest from the court presenting a somewhat severe frontage to the river, its many floors, its narrow windows, and its winches and hoists dangling outside serving to show that it was there that Septimus John Clifford & Son stored their goods from oversea. Huge doors leading by wide, shallow steps to the basement hinted that it was through these easy

portals that the wines of France, of Spain, and of Portugal found access to the vast vaults stretching away behind the muddy bank of the river.

The forecourt and its immediate background bore a very different appearance, for the garden, encompassed by moss-grown walls, was ablaze with flowers, while one huge mulberry tree reared its foliage before the main entrance of the building, its leaves rustling against the curious old dormer windows and strangely shaped balconies which adorned the front. Beneath the grateful shade cast by that mulberry tree lay Septimus John Clifford himself, at full length in a capacious basketwork chair, oblivious of his surroundings, careless even of the persistent flies that hovered about the gaudy silk handkerchief with which he had covered his head. Mr. Septimus was asleep. Clerks in the busy office within the huge bay window, not five yards from him, turned the leaves of musty ledgers with pathetic care lest they should awake the ruler of this establishment. The office boy, an urchin with round, rosy cheeks, swelled to the point of bursting, gathered up his feet upon the staves of his chair when the head clerk admonished him for shuffling them, and cast an anxious eye out through the wide-open window. Marlow, the clerk nearest to that sleeping form, almost held his breath; for he was apt to grunt and expand his lungs with a hiss that was exasperating.

"One hour, I think," observed Huggins, a white-haired clerk, who seemed to be the head of the office,

consulting a silver watch which was as large as a good-sized turnip. "One hour precisely, I make it."

"And four minutes," ventured his assistant, a thin, lanky man, white-haired like his comrade. "It is time to wake him."

"Yes, now; he would not forgive delay."

Huggins rose silently from the high stool on which he was seated and crossed to the door on tiptoe. He descended the picturesque steps leading from the main entrance to the place with as much care as he would have employed had he been stepping over hot bricks, and advanced to the side of his master, as if determined to leave him asleep till the very last possible moment. For that was the spirit which pervaded the establishment of Septimus John Clifford & Son. A good master was served by loyal and grateful clerks, of whom none were more loyal and thoughtful than Huggins, the stout, clean-shaven, white-haired man who had spent thirty years of his peaceful life in the office.

"Hem! Three o'clock," said Huggins, coming to a standstill and casting his eyes first at the sleeping form of his master, then at the waving foliage of the mulberry tree, and later out across the river to the southern shore, then almost devoid of houses. For we do not speak of London in this year of grace 1913, but of London in 1810, a city of huge proportions even then, but small and puny when compared with the mass of buildings which now stretch far and wide.

Smoke stacks and chimneys belching forth huge billows of dark cloud were not then such a feature of the giant capital. Green fields and waving trees came close up to the opposite bank of the Thames, while the few houses there were, the open country, and the stretch of shimmering water, with its quaint river craft, made a picture that was fascinating. From the shade and shelter of the forecourt the view was perfectly enchanting, and for a little while held all Huggins's attention, even though he looked out upon it every day of his life. Then he hemmed again, and gently touched the sleeve of the sleeper. Mr. Septimus stirred, then, hearing a cough beside him, sat up briskly, drew the handkerchief from his head, and, folding it with care, placed it in his pocket.

"Three o'clock, sir," said Huggins.

"No more?" asked Mr. Septimus.

"Five minutes past."

"Four," declared Mr. Septimus, consulting his own watch—one, too, of vast proportions. "The post has come?"

Huggins nodded.

"From Spain?"

"There are four letters."

"And from Portugal?" asked Mr. Septimus eagerly.

"One only."

"Drat the war!" cried Mr. Septimus, sitting forward with energy. "First this Bonaparte, Emperor of the French, disturbs all trade by pouring his soldiers into the Peninsula, and then he keeps up

the disturbance by refusing to agree that he's beaten. He's beaten, ain't he, Huggins?"

"If not quite, then nearly, sir," came the respectful answer. "But they say that Wellington has cleared Portugal of the French. Stocks of wines are coming through more freely."

The reminder seemed to hearten the master of this establishment; his face assumed a cheerful expression. Not that it had appeared seamed with care before, for Septimus was the personification of good humour. He was a short, stout little man, bald headed and slightly bandy legged. Round, inquisitive goggles sat on a broad nose that spoke of good temper. A white muffler and stock, together with an even whiter waistcoat, covered a frame which may be described as decidedly ample, while shapely legs—shapely even though prone to bandiness—were clad in snuff-coloured overalls, which fitted like the proverbial glove, and set off a figure that was decidedly attractive and gentlemanly.

He stretched out a hand and took the letters which his clerk had brought for him. Then, selecting the one from Portugal, he opened it with the blade of his penknife.

"From Dom Juan de Esteros," he said, extracting the sheet within the envelope. "Ha! That is good news. The tide of war turns to Spain, and wines are accumulating at Oporto. That is good, Huggins. Our clients will be glad to hear that we can soon replenish their cellars. Business will look up."

Huggins nodded, while his sallow features reddened a trifle; for what concerned the house of Septimus John Clifford & Son concerned him, not from the pecuniary point of view, seeing that he was paid a steady salary whether business were good or bad, but because of his sympathetic interest in the firm.

"We can do with it, sir," he said. "Things have been a little slow in the office. There has been little work after three o'clock. The clerks have been inclined to become sleepy."

"And no wonder," responded Septimus, looking up with a laugh. "Like master, like man, Huggins. Can't blame 'em for sleeping after dinner if I do. It's a bad habit, Huggins, a bad habit. All the same, I believe it helps one wonderfully. Couldn't get through these hot days if it weren't for the forty winks I snatch. But let's see. Dom Juan—ah! he thinks the time has come for us to have a direct representative in Oporto. Talks of indifferent health caused by the anxieties of the war. Asks us to send someone."

"Ahem! Yes, sir," came from Huggins suggestively.

"To send someone," repeated Septimus. "A representative, Huggins. Eh?"

"Master Tom," came promptly from the clerk. "And son, sir—Clifford & Son."

He laid special emphasis on the last two words, causing Mr. Septimus to look up at him and discover the old servant's face glowing. As for the owner of

this successful business of wine merchants, we can only say that he, too, looked enthusiastic.

"And son—yes, Huggins," he said. "How long is it since there was a son?"

"Seventeen years three months and two days, sir," was the answer. "Master Tom's age exactly."

"To the minute almost," laughed Septimus. "He's the one; he shall represent the firm at Oporto."

By the interest and attention these two gave to the affair one would have imagined that it was an entirely novel subject of discussion, whereas, to be precise, this quaint pair had long since settled the matter. For the "& Son" had become a feature of the business. Two centuries earlier Clifford & Son had first hung their trade sign outside those same premises, only in those days the house was exceedingly small and unpretentious. Still, there had been a son in the business, and thereafter, as the years passed, a succession of sons, while Septimus John had become, as it were, part of the stock-in-trade of this old house which boasted of the "& Son" always attached to it. However, in latter days, there had come a time when that old boast had almost failed them, for Mr. Septimus had succeeded his father at the age of thirty, exactly and precisely one day after the birth of his own boy. It was this same infant, christened Septimus John Esteros Thomas Clifford, who was now under discussion.

"You'll send him, of course, sir," exclaimed Huggins.

"Of course. He'd have gone two years ago if it hadn't been for the war. Drat the war, Huggins!" cried Septimus peevishly. "It has upset all my plans and ruined business. Here's Master Tom kicking his heels about the place and attempting to learn Spanish and Portuguese, when he should be in Oporto learning the languages simply because he couldn't help doing so, and at the same time attending to the business. I did that. I went out when I was sixteen, and came home for good at thirty. The son in this firm has been wanting ever since, for always the father has managed here in London, while the son has worked the business in Oporto. Tom shall go, and quickly too; I'll see him. What's that?"

Both heads were raised promptly, while Mr. Septimus and his clerk remained in their respective attitudes listening intently. From the room behind the wide bay window where the office staff worked there came not so much as a sound. Doubtless the white-haired junior clerk and his helpers still pored over their ledgers, while the fat office boy still sat with his legs curled around the supports of his stool. But from a room overhead there came the sound of strife. A girl's voice was heard, then came that of some young fellow, piercing and high pitched and querulous. The noise of a blow followed, a dull, heavy sound, which gave one the impression that a fist had descended on someone's jaw. A thud telling of a tumble came to the ears of the listeners almost immediately afterwards.

Mr. Septimus rose to his feet with agility and gathered up his letters. There was a severe look on his face as he made towards the steps leading into the house.

"Those two quarrelling," he said over his shoulder.

"Then it isn't Master Tom's doing," declared Huggins, with decision. "That Master José's always at him. He's sly, he is; he's jealous of his cousin."

"Then it'll be a good thing when they're separated. Ah! There again!" cried Mr. Septimus, as the sound of other blows came to his ears, as well as a scream of rage. "I'll go to them; this conduct is disgraceful!"

He bounded up the steps at a speed that would have surprised those who did not know him; for, as we have explained, the head of the firm of wine merchants was distinctly stout, and his appearance belied all suggestion of activity. But Septimus could move quickly when he liked, while his business hours were characterized by bustle. He stepped hurriedly across the hall and went up the wide oak staircase two steps at a time. He was panting just a little when he reached the door of the apartment wherein the scuffle was taking place and threw it wide open. And there he stood for a little time, breathing deeply, regarding the people in the room with wide-open eyes, which seemed to fill the whole area of his spectacles and take in everything.

"Stop this instantly!" he commanded, seeing two

lads struggling together in the far corner. "I have never seen anything more disgraceful."

The scene before him might well have drawn such words from the lips of the head of such a decorous firm as Septimus John Clifford & Son; for the room was in confusion. A heavy desk, occupying the centre, that would have been upset but for its weight, had been jerked out of position and now stood at an angle. A chair lay on its back, while an inkpot of large dimensions lay against the near wall with a wide puddle of ink about it, and the panelled wall itself was splashed in all directions with the same dark fluid. A young girl some sixteen years of age gripped one side of the desk, and stood there watching the contest with staring eyes that were decidedly frightened. Two lads occupied the centre of the picture, and as Septimus entered they were locked together in a firm embrace, each one endeavouring to belabour the other. But at the voice of command they broke away, one of them, a youth of medium height, promptly turning from his antagonist toward the door. The movement was the signal for the other to strike out swiftly, sending his fist crashing against the other's head, and following the cowardly movement by a kick which cut the feet of his opponent from beneath him, and brought the lad with a thud to the floor.

"That was a coward's blow!" declared Septimus hotly, advancing into the room; "the kick was contemptible. Stand away in that corner, José. I will

thrash you severely if you attempt another movement."

He closed the door quietly behind him, placed a seat at the desk so that he could see all three within the room, then slowly wiped and adjusted his glasses.

"Please explain," he began icily, when finally his glasses were adjusted. "I left you here at two o'clock. You had work sufficient to last you till the evening. What is the meaning of this disgraceful interruption? You, Tom, answer."

He looked closely at each of the lads in turn, and then fixed his eyes upon the one who had been struck in such a cowardly manner by the other. In doing so Septimus Clifford looked upon the counterpart of himself. For before him was the son who was of so much importance to the house of Clifford, the son who was to represent the firm in Oporto—the one, in fact, whom the reader will already have observed was particularly favoured by Huggins. Tom was of middle height, as we have remarked, well built and solidly put together. In spite of his ruffled hair and his flushed face there was something undoubtedly attractive about the young fellow, so much so that Septimus could not fail but note it.

"Looks me square in the face and eye," he muttered beneath his breath. "That's the way with the Cliffords. Knows he's probably in for a licking, and yet don't funk it. He's ready to receive what he's earned, and ain't going to lie to lessen the punish-

ment. Well?" he asked severely, for Septimus was not the one to show favour.

But Tom made no answer. He stood squarely facing his father, his character clearly shown upon a face that was decidedly pleasing if not exactly handsome.

"Well?" demanded Septimus again, more curtly if anything.

"Ask him, sir," came the reply, while Tom jerked his head at the lad over in the far corner where Septimus had ordered him.

"Then you," exclaimed the stout little man, turning to the second youth, he who had delivered the cowardly blow and kick. "What have you to answer?"

"He started it," came abruptly from the one questioned. "Tom called me names and struck me."

"Ah!" exclaimed Septimus, regarding the youth coldly, till the latter reddened beneath his scrutiny. "He started it, José, you say. Why?"

The youth addressed reddened even more at the question, while his eyes shifted from the face of his interrogator to Tom's, and then across to the girl's. Contrasting the two young fellows, Tom and José, one could not compliment the latter; for he seemed to be the very opposite of Tom. A year his senior, perhaps, he was lanky and lean, while his arms and legs and body seemed to writhe and twist as his eyes shifted from corner to corner. The chin disclosed weakness of character and want of firmness, to which

thin lips and watery eyes added nothing. In short, José was anything but attractive.

"Why did Tom start this quarrel?" asked Septimus relentlessly, his glasses turned on José all the while.

"I don't know," came the surly answer. "He's always quarrelling."

"Then you began the matter?" said Septimus, turning upon Tom the same close scrutiny. "Why?"

"He didn't!" came abruptly from the girl, who was standing a few paces from him. "José is not telling the truth. Even though he is my brother, I can't remain quiet and know that he is blaming Tom for what is really his own fault."

José's eyes gleamed as his sister spoke. His brows were knit together and his thin lips pursed, as is the case with one in anger. At that moment this unattractive youth looked as if he would willingly have struck his own sister.

"She favours him," he cried angrily. "She's always on his side."

"Silence!" commanded Septimus sternly. "Now, Marguerite, tell me about it."

"He started to tease me," declared the girl, nodding towards her brother. "He splashed the letter I was writing with ink, and then threw some over my needlework. Tom asked him to stop, and then called him a bully. José threw the inkpot at him promptly."

"Ah!" came from the man seated in the centre. "And then?"

"Tom knocked him down twice; then they began to struggle together."

"It's a lie!" shouted José, beside himself with rage, his pale lips trembling.

"Eh?" asked Tom curtly, advancing a pace towards him, and looking threatening.

"Stop!" ordered Septimus, lifting a hand. "By rights I ought to leave you two to settle the matter between you. I have no fears as to what the result would be; for a man or youth who accuses his sister of lying deserves a thrashing, while you, José, deserve it twice over. You have lied yourself, and I myself saw you deliver a cowardly blow. You will remain here and go on with your work; Tom will come below with me. For the future try to be friendly to one another, at least till you are parted."

"Parted?" asked Tom curiously, while a scowl showed on José's face.

"Yes, parted," repeated Septimus. "The time has come for you to go to Oporto, Tom, there to act as representative of this business."

José's face was a study as he listened to the words and saw the pride and enthusiasm with which Tom was so obviously filled. Even Marguerite was regarding her cousin as if he were a hero, and, indeed, that was the light in which she was wont to look at him. For ever since he was a little fellow Tom had been Marguerite's special protector, and often and often had he saved her from her brother's ill treatment. José was, in fact, a bully. Sneaking and mean

by nature, he was the very opposite of his sister, and ever since the two had been brought to the house he had been jealous of his cousin Tom. That was the secret of their ill feeling from the beginning. Provided José treated Marguerite fairly, Tom was prepared to live on good terms with him. But always José regarded Tom as a fortunate rival, as his future master; for was not Tom the son attached to the firm? And now to hear that he was to go to Oporto, there to rule the roast, filled José with envy and hatred. He could see Tom his own master, with clerks to do his bidding, while he, José, the less fortunate, was slaving at a humble desk in England. It roused his ire when he recollected that were there no Tom he himself would fill his place, and would one day be the head of the firm of Septimus John Clifford & Son.

The scowl on José's face had deepened as Septimus spoke. Tom's happy features incensed him to the point of bursting. A moment or so later, when the door had closed between him and the other three, and while their steps still resounded in the passage, José gave full vent to his hatred and anger. He pranced up and down the room. He glared out through the window as Tom appeared, and if looks could have killed, that young fellow would have ceased to exist forthwith. Then José flung himself petulantly on to a chair, buried his face in his hands, and remained in that position for some few minutes, his restless limbs writhing and twitching meanwhile.

Suddenly, however, he sat up and stared hard at the wall opposite.

"Why not?" he asked himself, as if apropos of nothing, while a cunning leer bent his lips. "If there were no Tom, José would go to Oporto. And who would carry out the work more fittingly? Tom shall not go there. I swear that I will prevent him."

He was poring over a book half an hour later when Septimus entered the room again with the intention of having a serious conversation with him, and to all appearances José was a different individual. He was sorry for the anger he had shown, sorry that he had insulted his sister, and eager to be friendly with everyone. But, then, José was a crafty individual. That night as he lay in bed within ten feet of our hero he was concocting plans whereby to defeat the aims of Septimus, and bring about the downfall of Tom, his cousin.

CHAPTER II

Underhand Conduct

Brisk action was a characteristic of Mr. Septimus Clifford, though his portly frame gave one the impression that he might very well be a sluggard. However, the bustle in those offices and warehouses beside the river, the numerous clerks poring over ledgers and papers, and the hands at work in the vaults amidst the huge butts of wine told a tale there was no mistaking. Order and method pervaded the establishment, and the master of the business was the creator of that order and method. As we have said, too, he was a man of action.

"I'll send Tom off this day two weeks," he told the respectful Huggins on the evening of that very day on which our hero was introduced. "That will put a stop to all fighting, and no doubt separation will wipe out old enmities, and in time to come the two, Tom and José, will be capital friends. There's a boat sailing on Friday fortnight."

"The *Mary Anne*," agreed Huggins. "Takes hardware from us, consigned to the supply department of Wellington's army. There'll be no difficulty in obtaining a passage."

"Then make all arrangements, please," said Mr. Septimus briskly. "I'll have a chat with the lad, and tell him what we expect of him. Send him to me."

The interview between father and son took place beneath the mulberry, in the quaint and picturesque garden before the house in which the firm transacted business, and there, seated in his basket chair, Septimus discussed affairs with Tom.

"You'll make every effort to improve and perfect your Portuguese and Spanish," he said, "and your French will be of the utmost use; for once the Peninsula War is ended, and the French are driven out, it will be one of your duties to arrange for wines to come from their country. Of course, at Oporto you will place yourself in the hands of your uncle, Dom Juan de Esteros, and will learn the business from him. Put your back into it, boy, for Dom Juan will, I fear, not be long with us. His health, always indifferent, has been much broken by the anxieties of the past few years. And now you'd best get your things together. Take a good stock of clothing, and perhaps a good pistol is advisable, seeing that the country of Portugal is still in a condition of disorder."

It may be imagined that the following two weeks were filled with moments of interest for our hero. He was going abroad for the first time in his life. He was about to make a start in the world, and that world at this moment looked exceedingly rosy, so rosy that Tom's face shone, his eyes flashed, he carried himself jauntily, and one and all could see

that he was full of good spirits to overflowing, and was eagerly awaiting the voyage.

"That Master José'd give his boots to be in his place," reflected Huggins one afternoon, as Tom went racing across the flower-decked courtyard, and Marguerite after him. "It was a bad day, Emmott, for this house when Mr. Septimus took him in and gave him a home. Not that I say that of the young lady. She's different; she's like Master Tom. We all love her."

"And dislike the brother—yes," agreed the junior clerk; "and I too have a feeling that Master José bodes no good to his cousin. See his face—he's watching the two going off down the river."

José was, in fact, lounging in the forecourt, one hand resting on the boundary wall, while his lean, lanky body and thin limbs twisted and writhed, as if to keep still were with him an impossibility. But it was not those twisting limbs that repelled the two old clerks watching him from the window—it was José's face. The brows were drawn close together, the lips were half-parted, while there was an intense look in the eyes which there was no fathoming.

"Bodes his cousin no good," Emmott ventured in low tones. "There's no love lost between 'em. Not that Master Tom isn't ready to be friendly. He is; for he's one of the easygoing sort. Still, he's a stickler for what's proper, and he's stood by Miss Marguerite as if he were her own brother. That José's scowling."

The lanky youth was actually doing that. No one could doubt the fact; but nevertheless it was impossible to read the thoughts passing through his brain. Could they have done so, both Huggins and Emmott would have found ample reason for their feelings of uneasiness. For José was scheming. Jealous of his cousin, as we have said already, he had been envious of Tom almost from the day when Mr. Septimus had brought his orphaned nephew and niece to his house. The children of Mr. Septimus's sister, José and Marguerite, had been born in Oporto, and had had the misfortune to lose first their mother and then their father, brother of Dom Juan de Esteros. Thereafter they had lived with Mr. Septimus as if they were his own children. And here was José scheming to wreck his cousin's chances in the world, whereas gratitude towards his Uncle Septimus should have made of him a fast friend, and one ready to help Tom to the utmost.

"Going to Oporto, there to lord it over the office," he was muttering between his teeth, as he watched Tom and Marguerite departing along the river bank. "That leaves me here to slave over musty ledgers and to learn the business from that old slowcoach Huggins. Suppose I'll always be a clerk. One of these days Tom will come back as master, and then he'll order me about."

It was a petty, childish manner in which to look at the matter, and showed the narrow-minded view which José took of life. Contrary from his cradle almost, he

was mean in thought and act, and here was one of his mean thoughts muttered beneath his breath, while his scowling eyes followed the retreating figure of his cousin. José writhed his way back into the house, and appeared again with a cap. Huggins, watching from the office, saw him go away along the bank of the river after the retreating figures of the other two.

"He's not up to any good, I'd lay," he told his fellow clerk, the white-haired Emmott. "What's he following for, I'd like to know."

"Then let me go after him?" asked the other. "There's a message to be taken along to the people who should have delivered goods to us this morning, and I may just as well take it as George, the office boy."

The matter was arranged on the instant, and within five minutes Emmott sauntered away in the wake of José. He followed him at a discreet distance along the river bank, till José dived in amongst a number of houses which clambered down to the water's edge. He caught sight of him again beyond them, and half an hour later watched him in converse with a ruffianly looking fellow whom he had accosted.

"Don't know the man," Emmott told himself. "Never saw him in my life before, so far as I am aware. José seems to know him. He's—he's giving him money."

Half-hidden behind the wall surrounding a warehouse, one of the many erected there—for this was a

busy part of the city, and huge barges found deep water when the tide was up, and could load right alongside the bank—Emmott watched as José passed something to the hand of the man he was conversing with. The latter, a huge fellow, dressed somewhat like a seaman, and bearded, might have been a sailor from one of the many ships lying in the river, or he might have been employed at one of the warehouses. He touched his forehead as José put something into his hand, while the lad himself looked craftily about him to make sure that no one was watching.

"What's he paying him for, that's what I'd like to know," Emmott asked himself. "He's up to no good; but how can one say that his talk with that rascal and the giving of money has anything to do with Master Tom? Mr. Septimus would laugh at the very idea, and tell us to mind our own business; but I for one shall keep my eyes on this José."

If the clerk imagined that he was thereby to catch José out in some underhand act he was very much mistaken, for the young fellow was as crafty as he was clever. More than that, though in his heart he hated Tom, he was wise enough to know that scowls and bad temper would not help him. From that very moment, indeed, he put on a smile whenever Tom came near, was urbane and friendly with all, and appeared to be genuinely sorry that his cousin was about to leave them.

"How'd you like to be a soldier, Tom?" he asked his cousin two evenings later, when our hero's prepara-

tions for departure were almost complete. "They're embarking troops this afternoon down the river, all bound for Wellington's army."

It was information which was bound to tempt the light-hearted Tom. For years, indeed, he had longed to be a soldier, and even now, when his prospects with the firm of Septimus John Clifford & Son were so apparently good, the old longing still assailed him. But if he could not be a soldier in fact, Tom could vastly enjoy the sight of troops embarking. He leaped at the opportunity, and that very afternoon saw him making his way down the bank to the spot, some two miles distant, where a sloop lay off in the river. Boats were passing to and from her when Tom arrived upon the scene, and for two hours at least he watched party on party of men embark, while his eyes feasted on others drawn up in stiff lines on the bank. The bright uniforms, the bustle, and the rattle of accoutrements and drums fascinated him. His eyes were wide open with envy as he noticed that two at least of the ensigns were no older than himself.

"And no stronger either," he told himself. "I'm as tall as they are, and though they repeat orders splendidly, and don't seem afraid to make their voices heard, I reckon I could do the same. What luck if the French drove the English back and got as far as Oporto. Then I'd see some of the fun. There's been terrific fighting in the Peninsula, and folks say that there will be a heap more. Ah, there goes the

colonel's horse aboard! I never saw a horse embarked in my life before."

Company after company of men descended to the boats and took their places. Tom's eyes followed with almost childish eagerness the figure of another youthful ensign. He was envious of his scarlet uniform, of his belts and sword, and of the gaudy headdress he was wearing.

"If only I were a soldier," he sighed. "I'd enjoy a few years' marching and fighting, and then settle down to the business. Ugh! An office stool hardly compares with the life those fellows are leading."

He forgot the hardships inseparable from a soldier's life. Tom failed to remember the reports he had read of the terrible plight of our men and officers in the Peninsula. He knew nothing of wounds, terrible wounds often enough, of disease which swept whole companies away, or sent them back home helpless and useless for the reminder of their lives. He saw only the glamour of a soldier's lot, the gallant uniforms, the jolly comrades, the bustle and movement of the life. So entranced was he, in fact, that he could have remained there for hours an interested and envious spectator. But the evening was drawing in, while only one company remained to be embarked. With a sigh, therefore, Tom turned about and began to retrace his steps along the bank in the direction of the premises of Septimus John Clifford & Son.

"I'm a fool to let the wish to be a soldier upset my keenness for office work," he reflected after a while.

"There are lots of chaps who would give their eyes for the opportunities I have. Yes, I'm a fool. I must settle to the thing I've got, and—all the same I hope there'll be some fighting round about Oporto."

"Hello, my sport!" he suddenly heard, as he was passing down a narrow street between two of the many warehouses in that district. "Just hold hard, and give us a pipe of 'bacca."

A huge individual came rolling towards him out of the darkness of a passage cutting into the street, and was followed by a second man, smaller than the first, but, if anything, more forbidding. Not that Tom could see them clearly, for it was very dark in that narrow street, the walls and roofs of the warehouses shutting the place in completely.

"Hold hard, shipmate," the big man exclaimed again, rolling forward. "A fill o' 'bacca ain't too much to ask from a man that follows the sea."

He was close beside Tom by then, while his shorter companion was immediately behind him. Even in that dark place one could see enough of the couple to feel sure that they were anything but desirable, and for a moment Tom considered the advisability of taking to his heels. But then, reflecting that here in the neighbourhood of the docks and quays there must be many seamen ashore on leave, and all perhaps hilarious, he turned to the strangers and answered them pleasantly:

"Sorry I can't oblige," he said. "I haven't started smoking yet."

"What, my lively! ain't started smokin' yet?" came from the bigger man. "Strike me, Bob, but here's a lubber as don't even chew, let alone take hold of a pipe!"

There came a giggle from the smaller man, who sidled forward, and coming from behind his companion, edged up to Tom's side.

"Don't smoke nor chew," he giggled in a queerly deep, gruff voice. "Most like he's a young gent that has got out o' nights without his mother knowing."

He dropped a parcel which he was carrying beneath one arm, and then stooped at once to pick it up. A moment later he had sprung up behind Tom, and with a quick movement had swung his parcel above our hero's head. What followed took the young fellow so utterly by surprise that he was completely dumbfounded; for a sack was drawn down over his head and shoulders, and long before he could lift his arms the bigger man had flung a coil of rope around him, pinning Tom's arms to his side. But still he could fight, and, seized with desperation and with anger, Tom lurched this way and that, kicking out in all directions, hustling his captors from side to side till what appeared to them at first a game began to annoy them. The bigger man clenched a huge fist and drove hard at the centre of the sack with it.

"That's silenced him and made him quit foolin'," he grunted brutally, for Tom dropped instantly and lay inert on the ground. "Jest get a lift on to his

toes, Bob; I'll take his head. We'll have him in chokey afore he's shook the stars out of his eyes."

Without the smallest show of haste the two ruffians picked up their burden and went off down the narrow alley leading from the street. There was no need for them to fear interference, for police hardly existed in those days, while respectable individuals did not patronize the neighbourhood of the docks once night had fallen. Business men, living as they did in the early years of the nineteenth century above their premises, sat in the candlelight behind their shutters once evening had come, and if they ventured forth at all, took some sort of guard with them. It followed, therefore, that no one even observed the two men strolling away with their burden. Even had they been seen, the observer would in all likelihood have hurried away in the opposite direction, for drunken sailors were inclined to be more than rough. Robbery was not by any means unknown, while even murder was now and again committed in the slums adjacent to the river.

In less than ten minutes from the moment when Tom had been so hardly treated the two men came to a halt at a low doorway, the bigger of the two beating upon it heavily.

"Open!" he shouted, as if there were no need for concealment, and he had no reason to fear being overheard. "Open quick, or Sam here'll want to know the reason why there's delay."

"Comin'," ejaculated his small companion in that

same strangely deep and wheezing voice, a voice which by rights should have belonged to a man of double his proportions. "I can hear the lass a-comin', Sam. Here she is. This is one more to add to the boys we're collecting."

At that moment, while the little man was in the act of stuffing some hard black cuttings of tobacco into a short pipe, the door of the house they had come to was opened noiselessly, and there appeared a frowsy-headed woman bearing a smoking oil lamp. She stood aside without a word and waited for the two men to carry in their burden. The door closed, and the procession passed through a passage into a large room, just within the doorway of which sat a man as big as he who had been called Sam, armed with pistol and cutlass. Half a dozen other men were in the place, breathing an atmosphere that was almost stifling. A dangling lamp shed a feeble light on every hand, while in one corner stood a bottle, in the neck of which was secured a lighted candle, with the aid of which another armed individual was laboriously spelling out the print on a piece of torn newspaper.

"What ho!" he cried, looking up, and disclosing a countenance which was distinctly brutal. A towsled head of hair, which would appear to have been innocent of receiving any attention for a long while, covered forehead and ears and neck, and was inseparably joined to a pair of side whiskers that might have been combed a year before. One cheek was deeply seamed by a long, straggling scar, while

the eye above was covered by a patch of black material.

"What ho!" he cried again, leering at the newcomers, and drawing his clay from between his teeth. "You've had luck to-night. I can see as you've nobbled the one as you was after."

"And gets double pay," growled the man who sat at the door with cutlass and pistol in his lap. "Pay from them as has need for lads aboard, and pay from t'others as wants to get rid of a friend. You've bagged the sum from the covey, Sam?"

Sam made no answer for the moment, but got rid of his burden by the simple and easy method of dropping Tom's person heavily on the floor. Standing over him, he proceeded to fill his pipe, and, having completed the task to his liking, stretched across, snatched the bottle in which the candle was fixed, and sucked the flame into the bowl of his pipe. Then his eyes went slowly round the room, and, passing the wretch at the door and the one against the far wall, he let them fall upon the six individuals who also tenanted the room. He counted them carefully, and then jerked his head in the direction of our hero.

"Pull the sack off, Bob," he said, "and jest you two keep yer tongues close in between yer teeth—hear that, Jem, and you too, Sandy? Tight in between yer teeth. This here business has to be conducted with caution and discretion; and if we does trade with others besides the folks that pays for the

men, why there ain't no need to cry it out for everyone to hear—eh?"

The last exclamation was almost in the nature of a threat. Evidently the individual with the patch over one eye, who boasted of the towsled head of hair and the unkempt whiskers, was known as Sandy, and Sam's words, and the scowl he directed at the man, had the instant effect of causing him once more to busy himself with his reading. The other, the man who sat fully armed at the door, and was known as Jem, coloured under his tan, looked as fierce as Sam for a moment, and then laughed uproariously.

"You do work yourself up, Sam," he laughed. "Who's there here to let on what business we do? These?" pointing at the six other inmates of the room. "Not much, me hearty. They'll be aboard come midnight, and to-morrow they'll be that sick they'll have forgotten you and me and everything almost. But you've drawn the stuff; been paid by that young spark as hired you to work it?"

Sam answered him with a snort and with a violent shake of his head.

"Presently," he said, meanwhile watching as the rascal Bob removed the sack from Tom's head. "All in good time. The young nobleman's coming here to make sure as there's no mistake, and once the lad there's aboard, the rest of it'll be paid. But it won't end there."

"Eh?" asked Jem quickly, while Sandy and Bob looked up keenly, avarice and rascality written on

their faces. "Don't end there," said Jem; "how's that?"

"Blood money ain't all we gets," lisped Sam, allowing a cruel smile to cross his face. "I'll tell you why. I know the young spark as got us to work this business. Well, when this lad's gone aboard, and is away, I'll be axing for more of his gold. Supposing he can't pay, then——"

A hideous grin wrinkled Sandy's face, throwing into greater prominence the scar that seamed it. Bob dragged the sack from Tom's head and then turned to smile at his leader. Jem brought a massive fist down with a bang on the table, and once more burst into uproarious laughter. It was obvious, in fact, to each one of these rascals that Sam had at hand a ready means with which to force more money from the man who had bribed him to capture our hero. Let us put the matter clearly. José had met the ruffian Sam some time before, and had discovered him to be one of those infamous crimps who earned a rich living by snatching men from their employment ashore and passing them over to ships' captains. The impressment of men in those days was not illegal, and since crews were often enough hard to come by, and these rascally crimps were more or less a necessary evil, they flourished unmolested, and many a poor lad was suddenly torn from his home to be smuggled aboard ship, and never heard of again by his own people. Also many a private grudge was wiped out in this manner. Tom was not the

first youth by a great many who had been suddenly spirited away at the bidding of, and with the aid of gold paid by, a relative.

As for the others in the room, they were prisoners like Tom. Four were young men of twenty-two or three, while the others were almost middle-aged, and undoubtedly sailors. These two sat at the table, smoking heavily and helping themselves to spirits contained in a square jar set upon it. The other men sat despondently upon a form, eyeing their captors resentfully, and yet in a manner which showed clearly that all the fight was knocked out of them. Like the two at the table they were becoming resigned to the position, and no doubt would settle down in time and become good seamen.

"Just throw a pail of water over his head," Sam ordered, pointing the stem of his pipe at Tom, who lay senseless where they had dropped him, his face pale in the feeble light of the lamp, his hair dishevelled, while a thin trickle of blood oozed from the corner of his mouth. "Then pull his duds off and let him have a suit that'll do for him aboard. Ah! He's coming round. Trust Sam to strike a blow that won't do no harm and spoil trade for him. Sit him up, Bob, and when he's feeling more hisself, give him a go of spirits and a smoke."

The whole affair was a horrible exhibition of the brutality and the lawlessness of those times—times even now designated by some as the good ones. The ruffians who plied this human traffic were as utterly

devoid of feeling as they well could be, and looked upon each one of their captures, not as a fellow being, but as so much value in gold, silver, and pence, so much profit in their business. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Tom's forlorn appearance had no effect upon them. The heartless and rascally Bob procured a pail of water and tossed the contents over him, drenching the lad from head to foot. He shook him violently, and when our hero feebly opened his eyes, the wretch placed a pannikin of strong spirits to his lips, dragged his head backwards—for he had placed his captive in a sitting posture, his back resting against a form—and roughly poured the contents into his mouth. The effect was magical. Tom sat forward with a gasp, spluttering and choking. The colour rushed to his cheeks, and in a twinkling he seemed to gather his wits and his memory together. How he got into that room, who the people were, he had no idea. But Bob's grinning face was within his reach, and he was undoubtedly the rascal who had dealt with him so roughly but a few seconds before. In any case Tom waited for no explanation. He launched himself at Bob, struck him heavily with his fist, and then closed with him.

"The young tiger," growled Sam, stretching out a huge hand and catching him firmly by the shoulder. "Blest if he isn't the boy to fight them Frenchies. Avast there, me hearty! Bob ain't used to violent assaults."

Bob evidently was not accustomed to hard knocks

himself, though he might often enough have cause to give them to others while plying his nauseous trade. In any case he was furious, and but for Sam, once the latter had torn Tom away from him, the smaller man would have vented his wrath by striking his almost fainting prisoner in the face.

"Avast there!" shouted Sam, keeping him off. "Ain't I axed you to bring him round quick, seeing as how the pressgang'll be along in a winking? Ain't we got to change his duds, and you there trying to make things wuss? Get off for the togs! Sandy, jest mix another go o' grog. It'll pull him round lively. Jem, I leaves him in your charge while I goes into the other room to do a little business."

Let the reader imagine a pale-faced and frightened youth cringing in the squalid den to which the rascal Sam made his way. There, beneath the same smoky lamp which the woman had borne to the door, sat José, writhing this way and that, his limbs never at rest for a moment, his fingers twining, his eyes shifting to every quarter, his lips twisting this way and that. José would have run from his own shadow on that occasion. The enormity of the crime he was perpetrating had frightened him intensely. Not that he thought of Tom; he was considering himself entirely. What if the whole foul scheme were discovered? What if Septimus were to learn of his action?

"Ho!" shouted Sam, bursting in upon him. "Come to see as all's well?"

José could not answer; his knees positively shook beneath him, while his bloodless lips would not frame the words he wished to utter. He lifted squirming, trembling fingers to his lips and mouthed at Sam. And then, with a huge effort, he managed to blurt out a few words.

"You—you've done it?" he asked.

"In chokey nice enough, master. Jest come along and take a squint at him. If he's the bird—and I don't doubt it—why, the trick's done, the money's earned, or mighty near it."

He led the trembling youth to the door of the other room, now closed upon the poor fellows placed there, and sliding a shutter to one side bade José look in.

"Eh?" he growled in his ear. "The right bird? No mistake, my hearty?"

Yes, there was Tom, pale and worn and sorrowful-looking, and more than a little dazed if the truth be spoken. José recognized him at once, and in place of feeling compassion for his cousin let all the old feelings of envy and resentment have full sway. The eyes looking through the shutter scowled at poor Tom. José's pallid cheeks suddenly reddened at the thought of an approaching triumph. He backed away, stepped into the smaller room again, and sat down with a swagger.

"He goes to-night?" he asked, with an attempt at firmness.

"To-night! Almost this blessed minute."

"And all his things are taken from him—clothes,

letters, and anything likely to let others identify him?"

"Everything, on my davy!" came the answer.

"Then here is the money—take it."

José handed over twenty sovereigns, and as if the act had sealed his guilt promptly began to tremble and writhe again. It was with a grin of triumph that Sam saw him off the doorstep.

"You'll take more golden coins from the same till as you took that from," he gurgled, chinking the money in his pocket. "It ain't hard to read that you stole it. Well, Sam'll have his eyes on you, and ef you don't like to hand out the cash, why, he's always got a way by which he'll make you."

An hour later there was the tramp of many feet in the street outside, and a hoarse command was given. By then Tom was feeling more himself, and indeed was disposed to show fight at any moment. But he was one against many, and in spite of protests had been compelled to change his clothing. Now the door was thrown open, and a dozen seamen marched in, each armed with a cutlass. The impressed men were placed in the centre of their guard, and were marched off down the river. A little later they embarked in a big cutter, a sail was hoisted, and presently they were bowling down stream at a pace which soon left the neighbourhood of London Bridge behind it, and with it the good-hearted Septimus, together with the sneaking nephew who had this very night done him such a mischief.

In the early hours Tom was hustled up the high side of a huge vessel, and was as promptly driven down a steep flight of steps into a dark hole, almost as noisome and unpleasant as the one in which Sam and his gang had first received him. The rattle of ropes and blocks upon the deck reached his ears, and soon the vessel rolled and heaved uneasily. They were off, leaving behind them some few distracted people; for Tom's sudden disappearance caused a commotion. He had disappeared as completely as if the earth had covered him. Nor was that his father's only loss; the cash drawer in his private office had been rifled, and some twenty-five pounds were missing.

"Master Tom steal! Never!" exclaimed Huggins, when all the facts were before him.

Mr. Septimus, as may be imagined, was heart-broken. When days had gone by, and more than a week had passed without even a word from our hero, the head of the house of Septimus John Clifford & Son became despondent.

"Dead!" he almost blubbered, as Huggins stood before him in the forecourt.

"Not a bit, sir," came the brisk answer. "Alive and kicking. Emmott and I have been looking into the matter. Master Tom's at sea; it won't be long before we hear from him."

CHAPTER III

Aboard a British Frigate

"Below there! You can come along up on deck, me hearties!"

An age seemed to have passed since Tom and his six companions were driven from the deck of the big ship to which they had been brought by the press-gang, and though the former had slept for many hours—for he had been exhausted after such a trying experience—yet the few hours he had been awake had dragged on leaden wheels. Meanwhile the rattle of blocks and ropes overhead had been replaced by the gentle surge of water alongside, and by a thousand strange groanings and squeakings common to all sailing vessels. Indeed, placed where he was, with his head close to the foot of one of the masts, that penetrated the deck of the ship and passed through the dark prison in which he and his comrades were confined, Tom could by the vibrations and the groanings of the latter tell exactly when the wind freshened and the sails dragged more strongly. But now, when he had begun to imagine that he would never again see the light of day, there was a banging overhead, then a square of light appeared, with faces

framed in it, while a hoarse voice bellowed a command. Tom rose briskly to his feet, and, seeing the ladder, ran up it.

"Here!" he reported, standing erect and cheerful. For Tom was, in his youthful way, quite a philosopher. "What can't be cured must be endured", was one of his maxims. "I'm impressed, by some error I suppose, and soon will be able to get the matter set right; but for the moment it's just as well to appear pleasant. Here, sir!" he reported to a short, stumpy individual with a decided flavour of the sea about him, and with a nautical appearance that would have passed him as a sailor in any port in the world.

"And ready fer duty too, eh, me hearty?" asked this bluff fellow, eyeing him critically, and taking Tom's measure very thoroughly. Looking back at him our hero could not help but see that this sailor had a grim expression. His face appeared to say: "Well, now, you can work if you like. If you don't you'll be hammered." There was a threat in his eyes, and a jaunty manner about him which told that he was prepared for the most refractory conduct.

"Ready fer duty, eh?" he repeated gruffly.

"Yes, sir," responded Tom promptly.

"Then jest you don't sir me, young feller-me-lad, else I'll think you're saucing. But I like yer looks—get up on deck with you. Mr. Riley, above there," he hailed, throwing his head back and staring up

through an open hatch, "here's a lubber as is willing and ready fer duty!"

Tom caught a glimpse of an individual dressed in white breeches and stockings, and a blue tail coat with some gilt braid about it, and, realizing that this must be an officer, promptly mounted the steps. In a moment or two he was on deck, standing beneath an expanse of white canvas, and upon boards which were as white as any tablecloth. Bluejackets were moving barefoot about the deck, while right aft an officer stood at the rail of the poop, a speaking-trumpet in one hand, his eye fixed on a dozen active figures scrambling amongst the rigging. Tom gave a gasp of pleasure as the sun's rays fell upon him, braced himself erect, and then looked the officer in the face. He was a young man of twenty-six, perhaps, with clean-shaven, keen features, his skin tanned brown by exposure, and the corners of his eyes wrinkled and puckered as is the case with many sailors. For the rest, Mr. Riley was decidedly a pleasant, jovial-looking officer, and won Tom's confidence at once.

"Well, my lad?" he asked pleasantly.

"Ready for duty, sir," reported Tom again, having nothing better to say. "And hungry, sir," he added, feeling a decided sinking sensation.

That brought a smile to the lips of the officer. He looked our hero up and down, just as the man down below had done, and then smiled again.

"What trade before you joined?" he asked, refer-

ring to a notebook, and producing a pencil with which to take notes.

"None, sir; I am the son of Mr. Septimus John Clifford, of London Bridge, wine merchant. My impressment must be a mistake."

"All impressments are mistakes," came the curt answer. "You are ready to serve His Majesty?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tom. "Ready for the moment. Later on, when I am able to prove that a mistake has been made, no doubt I shall be released. I'm ready for any duty, only I'd like a feed first."

"No trade; says he is the son of a wine merchant at London Bridge. Obviously a gentleman," Mr. Riley entered in his notebook. "A likely fellow, and cheerful. Will start duty at once, and willingly. Pass the call there for the master messman."

He stood before Tom, his neat figure swaying as the ship lurched here and there, his eyes now fixed on the swelling canvas, now on the officer at the rail, and often, when Tom's attention was attracted elsewhere, at that young fellow himself.

"Undoubtedly a gentleman," he told himself. "Of course in the case of nearly every man who is impressed there is a complaint that the thing is a mistake, that he ought never to have been impressed. In any case the whole thing is disgraceful. Better pay and better conditions would attract the right stamp of man to the navy. But we're here to carry out regulations, not to frame them. I'll keep my

eye on the lad. Name again?" he asked, making Tom jump.

"Tom Clifford."

"That the full name?" asked the officer, beginning to make another note.

"Septimus John Esteros Thomas Clifford," responded our hero, with a grimace. "Rather a lot of 'em, sir, I'm afraid."

"Enough even for an admiral," laughed the officer. "Ah, here's the messman! Waters, just take this young fellow with you and see that he gets a good meal. Report here to me, Clifford, when you have eaten."

He swung round to stare down into the depths of the ship, for sounds were coming from the prison in which Tom and his companions had been confined. There was the noise of a scuffle, while a glance below showed the burly, stumpy salt who had hailed the impressed men swarming down into the depths. Some of the men were, in fact, loath to come up. Unlike Tom, they were disposed to be sulky, and, lest trouble should follow, three sailors were swarming down after the old salt, one bearing a lantern.

"Below there!" called out Mr. Riley, anxious to avoid a struggle. "You men must understand that you have been impressed into His Majesty's Navy, and any disobedience of orders now, or violence, will be treated as mutiny. Send them up, me lad!"

The lamp shining upon the face of the old salt who had led the way below, and the fierce expression he

wore quelled any thought of mutiny there may have been, and within five minutes the other six men brought aboard with Tom were ranged on the deck, pale and dishevelled for the most part, sulky and anything but cheerful in appearance. Mr. Riley gave them the same searching examination that he had bestowed on Tom, and then entered their names and notes concerning each one in his book.

"Take them down to the messman and see that they have a good meal," he commanded, when he had finished. "They'll feel better when they've had it; and, mind this, my lads, a sulky face'll do nothing for you aboard this frigate. It'll bring kicks and cuffs and short rations; so look at the matter from the right point of view and take to the life cheerfully."

He dispatched them with a pleasant smile, for this Mr. Riley was a kind individual, and one well accustomed to dealing with men. He had the wisdom to see that hunger may produce easily enough a fit of sulkiness, and seeing that all the impressed men must be in want of a meal, and were undoubtedly sulky, he sent them off for that meal, hoping that with appetites satiated they would take to their duties with the same readiness as our hero had shown. Nor was he disappointed. When, half an hour later, the six men ascended to the deck again, they looked far happier, and from that moment fell into the ways of the ship with a cheerfulness that was commendable. As for Tom, he was up before them, and scrambling over the deck as best he could—for the breeze had freshened,

and the big frigate was jumping about in a lively manner—he drew himself up before the officer.

"Ready, sir!" he said, repeating the old expression.

"Feel seasick?" came the interrogation.

"Not a bit, sir. I've been to sea a few times with my father. We used to hire a sloop and cruise along the coast in summertime."

"Then you're used to getting aloft?"

"A little, sir, but only aboard a sloop. These masts are terrific."

He cast his eyes aloft, and the officer likewise. There could be no doubt that the masts did tower to a great height. But then this was a large frigate, with seventy grinning guns behind her closed ports. Tom knew that already, for the messman who had conducted him below, and who was decidedly a pleasant, kindly individual, had given him much information. The meal, too, had been partaken of on the lower deck, where the space between it and that above was so cramped that even Tom could not stand upright, while all along the sides, firmly cabled to ringbolts in the deck, were grinning cannon, sponge rods and all the paraphernalia necessary for loading being hung on racks close to them, and secured there firmly.

"You'd go aloft without feeling squeamish then?" asked Mr. Riley, feeling a strange interest in our hero.

"I'd go, sir," came the ready answer. "Whether I'd exactly like it at first is an altogether different matter."

"Then you'll soon have the opportunity of making the test. You'll be in my watch, Clifford. Now come along up on the poop. Don't forget to touch your cap as you come up; ah, wait though! We'll put you into proper sailor rig first; I'll send you down to be fitted."

It was perhaps half an hour later when a smart-looking young sailor obeyed the call of the boatswain and came aft to the poop. Dressed in his new clothing, his hair brushed and his face and hands washed, Tom looked a really smart young fellow, and Mr. Riley smiled his approval when he saw him.

"Pass him up, boatswain," he called, and at the order the burly individual shouted at our hero.

"Mind yer touch yer cap as you get above," he warned him, "just as Mr. Riley had done." And, obedient to the order, Tom raised his hand the moment his foot touched the poop or quarterdeck of the frigate.

"Come with me, Clifford," said Mr. Riley, leading the way. "I'm taking you to the commander. Fair-play is a thing a sailor prizes, and, as you complain that there has been some mistake about your impressment, I reported the same to the commander. He will question you himself."

They passed across a snow-white deck and entered a gallery, outside which an armed sentry was stationed, The officer tapped at a door, and passed in, followed by our hero. Tom found himself in a large cabin, at the back of which two guns were situated, roped and

secured to deck rings as were those others he had seen in the 'tween decks. An officer, dressed just like Mr. Riley, but evidently older, sat at a table, with charts spread out before him. He looked up as the two entered, and then went on writing.

"One of the new men, sir; impressed two nights ago; reports that he was taken in error. You have the notes of his case before you."

Once more Tom found himself being inspected with that open gaze which is the right of all officers. He returned the glance of his commander respectfully and firmly.

"Age?" asked the officer jerkily.

"Nearly eighteen, sir.

"Tell me all about yourself, lad," came from the commander, and with such kindness that Tom promptly responded. He gave the history of the family in a few words, and stated how he was about to sail for Oporto, there to learn the business of the firm and take charge when proficient.

"Ah! Anyone with a grudge against you?" was asked quickly.

Tom wondered and racked his brains. He could think of no one, unless it could be the grocer's young man, who was wont to pass along the river bank every morning. Exactly two months before he had had an altercation with that young fellow, who stood a trifle higher than he did, and was at least a year older. He had shown rudeness when passing Marguerite, and Tom had resented the rudeness.

The fight that followed had been of the fiercest, and the grocer's apprentice had been handsomely beaten.

"No one, sir," he answered, "unless it could be the fellow I had a row with some weeks ago," and then explained the occurrence.

"Pooh! Impossible," declared the commander. "Lads who get fighting don't bear ill will. The letting of a little blood cures a young chap of that entirely. You shook hands?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Then look elsewhere; someone perhaps was jealous of you, thought you were a nuisance. Who were the other members of the firm and the family?"

Tom told him, wondering all the while whether there were one amongst them capable of getting him impressed so as to remove him. "José?" he asked himself. "Impossible! He'd never be guilty of such ingratitude to father, though I suppose, if I were out of the way, he would succeed to the business one of these fine days.

Little by little the commander ferreted such thoughts out of our hero, and ended by placing his finger on the name of José.

"Your cousin, you said," he exclaimed. "You were always good friends?"

Tom had to reply in the negative, and give the reasons.

"And he was next in succession to yourself, I think?"

"Yes, sir. But—but it's impossible! My father rescued him and his sister from poverty."

"Nothing is impossible, my lad. This matter must be looked into. There seems no doubt that you have been impressed in the hope of removing you altogether. Or the matter may have been a mistake, helped by the fact that you were in those parts at a time when you should have been safely at home. For the moment you are in the service of His Majesty, and although I could order that you be given no duty, I've an idea that that would hardly meet with your wishes?"

"I'd rather work, sir," responded Tom eagerly. "I like ship life, and the experience may be useful. If only you will give me the opportunity of writing home, I will willingly act as one of the hands aboard, and work in that way till I am released."

"That's the spirit, my lad," exclaimed the commander. "He's in your watch, Mr. Riley, and I know you'll look after him. As to writing, you can do that; Mr. Riley shall see to it. I also will write to your father and to the authorities. We shall fall in with a boat homeward bound shortly, and in a week perhaps your people will know what has become of you. There, my lad, I like your spirit."

The commander shook hands with our hero, an uncommon honour, and then sent him off with Mr. Riley. And that very night Tom sat down in the latter's cabin to write his letter, telling his father exactly what had happened.

Next morning, early daylight, the first streak of dawn in fact, found him on deck, his feet naked, a deck brush in his hand. He joined the gang of men engaged in washing down, and, if the truth be known, thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Meanwhile the fine frigate was pressing along under easy sail, a fresh wind abeam, ploughing her way through a sunlit sea that might have belonged to the Mediterranean.

"We're jest cruising on and off watching for a Frenchie, me lad," explained one of his messmates, a jovial old salt who had seen many an action at sea. "There's never no saying when a Frenchie may turn up, and then we're bound to be at 'em. But they ain't so frequent nowadays as they was. Yer see, Spain and Portugal being joined to France, the French has simply to slip over the mountains, and that's how they're sendin' men in to fill the ranks of their armies. Queer thing, ain't it, that Boney should want them countries for his own? He's always a-grabbin'. The earth won't find lands enough for him by the way he's going on. But he'll get beaten handsome some day. I ain't so sure as we won't do it for him. Know all about this here campaign in the Peninsula, as Spain and Portugal's called?"

Tom modestly admitted that he knew something about the fighting. "It's a long business," he said. "Boney put his own brother on the throne of Spain, and of course the Spaniards wouldn't have him. At the same time he had taken Portugal for himself.

He's been the terror of Europe these many years, and as he aims at subjugating England also, why, we gladly agreed to go in and help the Portuguese and Spaniards. As for the fighting, there's been such a heap of it that it is quite bewildering."

"Aye, and it's easy to see as you're a gent as has been used to better things than the lower deck," said the salt. "What're you here for? Grabbin' something that wasn't yourn?"

He put out a hand to touch Tom's sleeve the instant after, for he saw him flush with indignation. "I'm sorry, lad," he said. "It's plain as it wasn't that."

However, the lower deck in those days was not peopled entirely by kindly disposed individuals. Bluff and hearty and plucky men there were in abundance, if their language was not always refined or their habits too particular. But then, as now perhaps, the coming of a young fellow of Tom's stamp amidst a rather rough crowd was apt to draw attention to him, attention not always of the most pleasing. And it so happened that there was one in the mess to which Tom had been posted who seemed to resent his coming. Higgins was a bull-necked, squint-eyed young fellow of some twenty years, and had been sent from a prison to the navy, as had many another. He was possessed of a thin, mean face, over which dangled one long forelock. For the rest, it may be stated that he was accustomed as a general rule to say very little, having

discovered himself unpopular amongst the men; though, to be sure, whenever there did happen to arrive aboard the ship a youngster smaller than himself, Higgins was the first to attempt to bully him. For some reason he had taken a violent dislike to Tom. Possibly he was jealous of the attention he had gained, or of the way in which he came to good terms with the men. Whatever the cause, he was determined to browbeat him, and took this, the first opportunity.

"I dunno as you ain't right, Jim," he sang out coarsely, the instant the other had spoken. "Why shouldn't he be here for grabbin'? There's lots comes to the navy on that account, and why shouldn't he? I'll lay he has, too."

"Then you're mistaken," said Tom firmly. "I was impressed; every fool knows that."

"Oh, every fool knows it, do they?" was the sharp answer. "You ain't calling me a fool?"

"Jest you put a stopper on yer tongue and belay," sang out the salt, seeing all the elements of a quarrel in this discussion, and noticing Tom's flushed cheeks, and the rising anger of Higgins. "'Sides, I ain't Jim to you, me lad, and don't you ferget it. I'll take a rope's end to you afore you're a minute older if you ain't careful."

But Higgins had allowed his temper to rise to the point where it was uncontrollable. He had expected Tom to accept his remarks meekly, as became a new hand, and, finding he had not done so, was determined

to pick a quarrel with him. There are always such cantankerous individuals in the world, and it was Tom's fortune to hit up against this one. He, too, was roused, for he resented the man's impertinence.

"I'll back as he's a jail bird," declared Higgins, thinking that by making a firm stand in this altercation he would stimulate his own popularity amongst the men. "He's a gent that's took the money out of the till and then been collared. The easiest way to cover the thing was to hand him over to a crimp. That's how he's here—I know him."

He had probably never set eyes on our hero before, and had he done so would not have dared to address him in such a manner. But Tom was one of the deck hands, one of themselves, and, moreover, a newly-joined recruit, too often destined for a time to be the butt of his fellows. Higgins counted on his giving way at once. Most recruits are awe-stricken at first by the strangeness of their surroundings, and perhaps by the roughness of their companions. Besides, bullying airs and ways, backed most probably by other individuals, are apt to cause a young fellow to choose the easier path and swallow his displeasure. However, Tom was one of the obstinate sort. Fighting was nothing new to him, and to show his readiness for a contest, and the fact that he was by no means afraid of an encounter, he promptly began hostilities by pitching the contents of a jug of water over Higgins.

"I'll ask you to understand that when I say a

thing I mean it, and that I tell a lie for no one," he said, rising from his seat and undoing the neckerchief which he, like the others, wore about him. "I don't know what the rules are aboard a king's ship; but this I do know, I allow no man to suggest that I am a thief or a liar. Take back what you've said or I'll trounce you."

There was a commotion in the 'tween decks by now. Men crowded about the long narrow tables stretching from the side of the ship towards the centre, and which was one of many. Like the rest, too, it was constructed to lift up to the deck above and be attached there, leaving the decks free for movement. Jim had meanwhile risen to his feet, and now held his hand high for silence.

"Mates," he said, "there's trouble brewin' here. This new mate of ours is a good 'un, and I'll not allow him to be stamped on. Higgins here has just now called him a thief and a liar, and the young spark has drenched him with water. If Higgins don't come down handsome with a 'pology there's only one thing left."

"A set to, and right it'll be," burst in another of the men, one of the seniors. "Fightin' don't do no great harm, and it's necessary when one mate calls another names that tastes nasty. You, Higgins, admit you called him a liar and a thief?"

"Of course," came the coarse answer. "I'm goin' ter thrash him."

"You are, are you?" came the grim reply from

the old salt, while he sized up the two young fellows swiftly, craning his head to one side as if he were a bird. "I dunno so much; the new mate looks as if he could use his hands lively. You ain't goin' to 'pologize?"

"Not likely! I'll hammer him till he'll be glad to admit that what I've said's as true as gospel."

If he imagined that Tom would keep him waiting he was much mistaken, for that young fellow had already rolled his sleeves to the elbow. Indeed, as we have intimated, he was no novice. Not that he was by nature quarrelsome; but those were rough days, and like many another boy Tom had need now and again to defend his honour. He stood away from the table, waiting while it and two or three next to it were swung out of the way. Then, bending low so that his head would not hit the deck above, he stepped to the centre of the circle which the men immediately formed.

"Any sort of rules?" he asked coolly. "Anyone keepin' time?"

"Go as you please, mate," came Jim's answer. "A sailor don't ax fer breathing time if he comes up alongside a Frenchie, and you don't have no call for it either. It's the same fer both, and as fair and square as may be. But it'll have to be straight work. We stops the fight if there's foul hitting."

A fight in the 'tween decks was no unusual occurrence in those days, and was a source of some in-

terest to the men of the navy. Hard fellows without an exception, they had been brought up in a stern school which taught that a man must look to himself alone for protection. But they could recognize spirit, and Tom took their fancy wonderfully.

"He's game, he is," declared one of the men, as he doubled his arms and pressed forward to watch the contest. "And he ain't no weakling. You can see as he's not used to haulin' and suchlike, and ain't been a tar over long. But I like his figure-head. It's clean and well-cut, and he's a beam on him that carries weight, and'll lend strength to a blow when he gets one home. He ain't no new 'un at the game, I'll stake my Davy. That boy has been grappled on to a job like this many a time."

The ten minutes which followed proved that Tom was something also of a scientist; for he played with his antagonist. It was clear, in fact, after five minutes that he would be the victor, though at first he had some ugly rushes to stop and some hard hitting to protect himself from. But science and generally good condition told, and while at the end of some ten minutes, during which the two broke away now and again to pant and glare at one another, only to begin once more at the shouts of the crew, Higgins was almost in a condition of exhaustion, Tom was still comparatively fresh. He stopped a furious and last attempt on the part of Higgins to rush him up against the side of the ship, and then,

darting forward, struck the man full in the mouth, sending him sprawling.

Higgins lay for a minute without movement, and then his hand went back towards the knife which, sailor-like, he carried attached to his belt and well behind him.

"Drop that!" shouted Jim. "Now, Higgins, you as was a-goin' ter whack this young shaver, say as you 'pologize for callin' him names.

For a second there was defiance on what was still recognizable as that young man's face. Then he nodded his head in assent. Tom at once went towards him, his hand outstretched.

"Shake hands, and let's be friends," he said. "I dare say you didn't understand how I'd take what you said. But where I come from a man fights and fights again when another calls him thief or liar. There, shake hands and let's be friends in the future."

There was a cheer at that, while the men gathered round our hero, patting him on the back with such heartiness that his remaining breath was almost driven from his body. Some of the more enthusiastic even began to chair him, and had carried him as far as the deck ladder, when the sudden shrill piping of whistles and the appearance of an officer put a stop to the movement. It was Mr. Riley, a long glass beneath one arm, his other hand on the rail of the ladder.

"My lads," he began, about to give an order, and then, suddenly catching sight of Tom, ceased

abruptly. Casting his eye over the heads of the men, he soon picked out the somewhat miserable figure of Higgins.

"Ah," he said, "a fight! My lads, strictly against orders. But I've news for you—we've rounded up a Frenchman. Clear these decks."

He was gone in a twinkling, his coat tails swinging behind him. But as he turned he contrived to smile at our hero.

"Licked that young man Higgins. That's good," he was saying as he raced up the ladder. "Young Clifford has courage. Wonder how he'll behave when shot and cannon balls come crashing amongst us; he's just the boy for this service."

When Tom had washed his face and had clambered to the deck he saw a large vessel some four miles away, bearing up towards the frigate, while a smaller one sailed behind her.

"Ship o' the line, mate," said Jim, who was leader of the squad of men of whom our hero was one, who had the working of one gun. "It'll be tough business, and ef she wasn't so big I doubt as she'd sail up so cocky towards us. But we'll give her what for; we're fair death on Frenchies."

A magnificent sight the Frenchman made as the distance between the two vessels decreased. Tom peeped at her through the wide-open port and admired the enormous spread of white above her, the seething foam at her forefoot, and the gleam of her broad decks that came into view now and again

as the ship heaved to the swell of the ocean. Then a spout of white smoke burst from her fo'castle; a flash severed it in twain and was followed after a distinct interval by a dull reverberating report. The shot reached its mark almost at the same moment. There was a crash within ten feet of Tom. The side of the vessel at that point burst inward in a hundred splinters, and the iron messenger struck the very next gun to his, slithered and crashed across the 'tween decks, and finally brought up short against the opposite side. It roused a cheer of excitement from the crew.

"That's shootin'!" cried Jim. "She's the sort for our money. In a jiffy we'll be layin' into her. Just take a sight along the gun, Tom, and larn now how to pitch a ball into a Frenchie."

CHAPTER IV

A Naval Encounter

In the ordinary way the immediate prospect of an encounter at sea might be expected to rouse qualms in the breast of a novice, and we cannot affirm that Tom would have been any exception to the rule on this his first meeting aboard an English frigate with a French man-of-war. But there was so much else to attract his attention. Even in those days the wooden walls of our stout ships contained sufficient to interest even a dullard, and to a lad of active brain, as was our hero, there were things to watch and marvel at, while the men themselves grouped in the 'tween decks were quite a study. They stood about their guns stripped to the waist, joking and merry, the master of each gun with his eye on the sights. Close at hand a lad sat on a long narrow tub filled to the brim with powder.

"Powder monkeys we call 'em," said Jim in a hoarse whisper. "The young villains! They're always up to some sort o' mischief, and when it comes to fighting, blest if they wouldn't take on the whole of Boney's fleet alone. They ain't the lads to squeak. If we fetch up alongside the French-

man, and there's a call for boarding parties, them imps is amongst the first to answer."

"Stand ready!" the order came at this moment, and turning his head Tom caught a glimpse of Mr. Riley, still with a long glass beneath his arm, his sword belted to his side, and his shapely form bent so as to allow him to peer through one of the ports. "Stand ready, men," he shouted. "Gun layers train your sights on the enemy and aim low. Between wind and water is the mark, lads!"

The crew of the guns answered him with a cheer, and for a while gun layers stretched over the weapons they commanded, sighting for the enemy. Tom watched as Jim squinted along the sights, and then peered out at the French ship of the line. She was bowling along before a fresh breeze, heeling well over, so that half her deck showed. He could see a mass of men on it, and others running to and fro, while quite a number were clambering into the rigging.

"Shows she means to come right up close," said Jim in his gruff way. "That'll suit us nicely. Hammer and tongs is the best sort of fighting for us boys, and we don't get it too often. She's going to run right in and when there's a broadside it'll be a close one, and thunder won't be in it."

"Stand by to fire!" was heard through the 'tween decks, while an instant later there came a roar from the deck above, a trembling and shaking of the whole vessel which all could feel, and then the rumble of wheels as the guns were run in, sponged out and

reloaded. By now the enemy had disappeared from sight behind a huge cloud of smoke, which, however, was whisked away swiftly by the breeze. It was a minute later, perhaps, when the French battleship was again visible, that Mr. Riley gave the order to fire, and Tom was witness of the result for the first time in his life. Jim touched the vent of the gun with his portfire, and instantly a squirt of flame and smoke shot upward. There was a huge commotion in the gun itself. Though braced into position by numerous cables it started backward, drawing them as tight as iron bars, while the wheels thudded heavily on their runners. The commotion was accompanied by that of every other gun on that deck in the broadside, while the ship herself shook from end to end. The roar of the discharge was indescribable, and deafened him, while the 'tween decks was instantly filled with volumes of sulphurous smoke.

"Slack off! Haul her back, boys!" came in stentorian notes from Jim. "Run her in quick. Now with the sponge rods, and we'll have a second charge into her before the smoke's cleared."

Five minutes later Mr. Riley's voice was heard. "Stand by for another broadside," he bellowed. "Double shot your guns next time—ah!"

The frigate quivered from end to end; she seemed to have been struck by a cyclone. An iron hail beat on her sides, bursting them in in many directions, while splinters of iron and wood flew across the 'tween decks, striking men down in many directions. In

one brief second the orderliness of the place was transformed to the most utter disorder, as the enemy had answered the frigate's broadside with one of her own. Tom looked about him wonderingly, dazed by the commotion and astounded at what he saw. For by now the wind blowing in at the open ports had cleared all the smoke away, and he could see all that was happening in the 'tween decks. There lay the gun on his right a wreck, turned on its side, its muzzle crushed out of sight, two of its wheels broken and half-buried in the deck. What had before been a square porthole was now an irregular, torn opening, through which a vast expanse of sea could be watched. But it was the poor wretches who had manned the gun who claimed his greatest attention. Five of them lay mangled upon the deck, with pools of blood accumulating about them and draining off towards the scuppers in trickles and streams. On the port side, opposite where the gun had stood, three men had been struck by the missile, and lay silent and motionless. Elsewhere there were rents in the side of the frigate, and men lay about in all postures, some moaning, others silent, nursing a wounded arm or leg. This was war; this was the treatment meted out by one nation to another.

But of loss of discipline there was none. If the 'tween decks was in disorder there was order amongst the men, and no flinching. Already the surgeon's mates and helpers were carrying the wounded away towards the ladder leading to the cockpit, while at

every gun stood its crew, immovable and ready, waiting the word of the officer. As for the enemy, the shapely lines of the French man-of-war had changed wonderfully, for she was so near now that one could see distinctly. The white deck, still careened towards the frigate, was seamed and scarred and torn. One mast lay over her rail, the sails towing in the water, and her sides were marked by shot holes, two of her ports having been converted into one by an enormous rent that extended between them.

A dull cheer resounded through the frigate; the men in the 'tween decks took it up lustily, and then came again that commotion above. The vessel shivered, shot and flame and smoke belched from the ports on the upper deck, the roar being followed once again by the rumble of gun wheels on their metal runners.

"Fire!" Mr. Riley stood halfway up the ladder leading to the upper deck and waved his cocked hat at the crews under his own command. Crash! went the broadside. Tom watched the powder at the vent squirt upward in flame and smoke as on a previous occasion, and then sprang to the cables as Jim's husky voice called to his own crew to draw the gun in and reload.

"Double shot; don't forget," bellowed Mr. Riley, and obedient to the order the loaders thrust first one and then a second huge iron ball into the gaping muzzles. In the middle of the operation there came a resounding discharge from the enemy, while huge columns of smoke hid her sides. But the shot failed

to strike the frigate, for a few seconds earlier the commander had put his helm up and had sheered off towards the Frenchman. It was a clever manœuvre, and made a wonderful difference to the fight in progress. For the enemy had received four successive broadsides now, and had returned only one effective one, and that not so effective as it might have been had the ships been nearer. Added to that, it was less than five minutes later when the gunners on the port side got their sights aligned on the enemy, and a simultaneous broadside was delivered by the guns of the upper and 'tween decks. Then the commander swung his helm again and made across the stern of the Frenchman.

"Stand ready," sang out Mr. Riley again, his eyes glued upon the man-of-war. "Layers concentrate on the stern. In one minute, men; in one minute we shall be there. Now! Fire!"

Running round in a circle after crossing in the wake of the Frenchman, the frigate had gone about after emptying her complete port broadside, and had then swept round in rear of the enemy. It was a manœuvre which, if not quickly carried out, might have ended in disaster. But nothing occurred to disturb it, while the Frenchman, impeded by his broken mast and the sail dragging in the water—and slowed considerably thereby—was unable to counter the movement by swinging also. It followed, therefore, that the frigate had an enormous advantage, and, making the most of this, crossed and recrossed

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"CRASH! WENT THE BROADSIDE"

the rear of the enemy, emptying first the starboard broadside and then every gun on the port side. As for the French battleship, her guns were useless. Not one of her broadsides could be brought to bear, and though she sheered off to the south a little, the commander was at once able to alter his own position correspondingly.

"It's a victory," said Jim, with elation. "The man that laid the gun that brought down that mast deserves to be made an admiral this minute. It's saved lives aboard this ship, boys. It's won the battle."

"Shall we board her now?" asked Tom, who was densely ignorant of naval matters.

"Board her! Not us!" cried Jim. "Where's the use? She carries two or three men to every man jack of us, and would have all the chances if we boarded, not that I say as we wouldn't do the business. But we've the best of it like this. She's cut that mast adrift, but it'll be hours before she can refit, and meanwhile we've the legs of her. We've only to keep here, astern, plugging shot into her all the while, and she's bound to give in before long. Of course she can't do that yet awhile. That wouldn't be fighting, and I'm bound to say that the Frenchies are good at the game, almost as good as we are. She'll hold on and endeavour to best us; but she'll have to haul down her colours before very long. Ah! What'd I say? Look at 'em!"

The flag of France flying aloft on the enemy was seen to flutter. It dropped a foot or two and then

came down with a run. Instantly a hoarse bellow resounded through the frigate. Men gripped hands and cheered, the shouts coming from every deck. Even the wounded, who had not all been removed, sat up with an effort and cheered as best they could.

"Silence, men," came from Mr. Riley at this moment, and turning they saw him standing halfway up the ladder, bent so that the men could see his face. "Stand to your guns all the while; don't draw charges till you get the order. Jim there, from No. 4 gun, send me four of your men to join the boarding party."

Tom noticed that the officer had been wounded, for he carried one arm in a sling, and there were stains of blood on his breeches. He was wondering how he had come by the wound, when Jim struck him heavily on the back.

"Avast dreamin' there, me hearty," he shouted hoarsely, still elated at what had happened. "Get off to the officer and go aboard the ship. You'll see something to interest you."

Tom wanted no more coaxing; he dropped the cable on which he had been hauling and went at a run towards the ladder, followed by the other men. They kept close on the heels of Mr. Riley, and in a twinkling were on the main deck. There the commander was now stationed, and about him a group of officers and men.

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Riley!" he exclaimed. "We'll go aboard in the cutter, taking three men from each deck. Step in, my lads."

Tom scrambled into the boat with the crew, and watched as it was lowered away. He was filled with amazement, first that a boat of such proportions as the cutter could support so many men when hung to her davits, and then that she could be safely lowered with such a load to the water. Meanwhile he noticed the high sides of the frigate, the officer up on the quarter-deck, and the men of the watch away aloft in the rigging. The frigate lay inert, her sails flapping, while, almost a quarter of a mile away now, the French ship lay in the water, slowly heaving up and down, with a peculiar and significant twist in one of her masts.

"Struck by our broadsides as we passed and repassed," Mr. Riley told him as they were lowered away, for the officer happened to be close to our hero. "She had bad luck. It's rare that one brings down a mast at the first discharge, and that of course proved her undoing; the loss of the second makes her useless for fighting purposes. This has been a gallant action and will give us no end of credit. Ah, there goes a recall gun!"

A spout of flame and smoke belched from the frigate a little above the heads of the men in the cutter, for the latter had now reached the water, and turning his head Tom watched the ball discharged strike the sea some two hundred yards ahead of the small sloop that had been sailing in company of the battleship, and which had now changed her course.

"She'll not disobey the order," reflected Mr. Riley. "Once we are aboard the enemy the frigate could

sink that vessel within ten minutes. There go her sails aback; she'll swing round and come in like a docile dog. Now, lad, clamber aboard when we reach the ship; you come as one of my escort."

"You're wounded, sir," said Tom. "Let me fasten that sling for you again; it's too long, and doesn't support the arm."

He undid the knot with the help of fingers and teeth and then rearranged the sling. By the time he had finished they were under the counter of the French battleship, to which a man at the stern and bows of the cutter clung with a boathook. At once a midshipman sprang at a dangling rope ladder and went swarming up with the agility of a monkey, two of the crew following. Tom picked up a coil of rope and without a question made a noose fast round the waist of the officer who had already befriended him.

"I'll get aboard and help to haul you up, sir," he said. "You'd never manage to clamber up that ladder with one arm wounded."

He waited for no orders, but, springing at the ladder, went scrambling up, the end of the rope secured between his teeth. A minute later Mr. Riley was being hoisted to the deck of the French battleship. Then the commander followed, and after him more of the crew, with two officers.

Tom found himself looking down upon a scene which was almost indescribable; for the ship had been cruelly mauled by the broadsides of the frigate. There were a dozen holes in her deck, where shot had pene-

trated, while in many places the rails were driven in. A dismounted gun lay in one of the scuppers, with part of her crew crushed beneath it; and from end to end of the ship there were signs of the awful havoc the iron tempest had created. Men lay in all directions and in all postures. The damaged mast swung by the starboard halyards and threatened to fall inboard at any moment, while a huge stretch of crumpled and shot-holed canvas covered one portion of the deck. To add to the scene of ruin, smoke and flames were belching from a hatch towards the stern of the quarter-deck, and some fifty sailors were endeavouring to quench the conflagration with water cast from buckets. Almost opposite the spot where the ladder dangled, and where the victors had come aboard, was a group of officers, and in their centre one seated on a chair, pallid to the lips and obviously wounded. The commander went towards him instantly and took him by the hand.

"You are hurt?" he asked. "You have fought your ship gallantly, but fortune was against you. Go to your quarters, please. I will take no sword from an officer of such courage."

He put aside the sword that was offered him so feebly, and signed to men of his crew to lift the injured officer. Then he shook hands with the other Frenchmen present, many of whom shed tears as they replaced their swords in their scabbards.

"Ah, monsieur," said one, who seemed to be the second in command, "it was the fortune of war, but

bad fortune for us. With that mast shot away we were helpless, and then your broadsides poured into our stern tore the lengths of the decks, and did terrible damage. Our poor fellows were shot down in heaps. War, monsieur, is a terror."

None could fail to admit that who visited the French ship, for what had been a well-found, trim vessel was now a shambles. It turned Tom sick and faint when he looked about him, so that he was forced to cling to the rail. But a moment later, when Mr. Riley called him, he was able to pull himself together.

"We're to go aboard the sloop and see what she is," he called. "Help to lower me into the cutter."

Half an hour later Tom clambered up the side of the smaller vessel, and hauled his officer up after him. They found a French midshipman in command of a crew of five, while beneath the hatches there were three prisoners.

"Release them," Mr. Riley ordered; and, taking a couple of the French crew with him, Tom saw the hatch lifted, and called to the men below to come up. The smart uniform of an officer showed through the square hatch at once, and in a moment or two a youth stood on the deck before him, whom one would have said was British to the backbone.

"Ensign Jack Barwood, 60th Rifles, sir," he reported, drawing himself up in front of Mr. Riley and saluting. "Going out to join my regiment, this little sloop in which I had taken passage was held up by a French man-of-war. Our men were taken off,

that is, the crew. I and two of my own men were left here as prisoners. We heard heavy firing, and guessed there was an action. What has happened?"

Mr. Riley turned and pointed at the French prize won by the frigate. "We beat her," he said, with pride in his tones. "You've had luck to escape so early from a French prison. Where were you bound for?"

"In the first place, Oporto," came the answer. "Later, as a prisoner, for Bayonne. Now, I suppose, we shall have to return to England?"

As it turned out, however, it was to Oporto that the little sloop made.

"The frigate makes for home at once," Mr. Riley reported, when he had rowed back to the ship, and had again come out to the sloop. "She sails in company with her prize, and no doubt the home-coming will be a fine triumph. I have orders to take this sloop to Oporto, there to hand over this young fellow to the authorities."

He pointed to Tom and smiled, while the ensign, turning upon our hero, surveyed him with amazement, and with some amount of superciliousness if the truth be told.

"Pardon, sir," he said, "I don't understand."

"Of course not," came the smiling answer; "nor does he. Come here, Tom."

Our hero, as may be imagined, was just as dumbfounded as the ensign; for though Mr. Riley had been wonderfully kind to him from the beginning, his

manner had suddenly changed. He addressed him as if he were an equal, not as if he were one of the crew.

"I'll explain," he smiled, seeing the bewilderment expressed by both young fellows. "While the action was passing between us and the man-of-war our look-outs reported a sail in the offing. She has come up to us since, and turns out to be a smaller frigate than ourselves. But the point is this—she left the Thames after us, and has carried a brisk breeze with her all the way. She asked at once for information concerning a young fellow brought aboard just before we weighed, who had been impressed by a gang having quarters near London Bridge. That, sir, is the young fellow."

He pointed at Tom, whom the ensign still regarded in amazement.

"The whole thing has been cleared up, of course, said Mr. Riley. "There is no longer any doubt that this gentleman is the son of Mr. Septimus John Clifford, wine merchant, of London Bridge."

"Eh?" suddenly interjected the ensign, staring hard at Tom. "Clifford, of London Bridge. Well, I'm bothered! Why, Tom, don't you know me?"

It must be confessed that our hero was somewhat taken aback. In this young officer so much above himself, clad in the handsome uniform of the 60th Rifles, he had not recognized an old friend. Indeed his attention had been centred on his own officer. But now, when Jack Barwood lifted his cap, Tom

recognized him at once, and gave vent to a shout of delight.

"Why, it's you!" he cried, gripping the hand extended. "Haven't seen you since—now when did we meet last?"

"Time you licked that cub of a grocer's boy," laughed Jack, who seemed to be just such another as our hero, and who was evidently a jovial fellow. "He passed when we were with your cousin, and grinned and sauced you. You were at him in a jiffy."

Mr. Riley laughed loudly when he heard what was passing. "Why, he's been at one of our men aboard the frigate," he cried. "Hammered him badly just before we fell in with the Frenchman. He's a tiger."

"He's a demon to fight, is Tom, sir," laughed Jack. "Ask him how we became acquainted."

"Eh? How?" asked the officer curiously, and then pressed the question when he saw that Tom had gone a crimson colour and was looking sheepish. "Eh?" he repeated.

"He's pretending to have forgotten," shouted Jack, enjoying the situation. "I'll tell the tale. It was at school one day. Tom was chewing toffee, mine had disappeared from a pocket. I tackled him with the theft, and we went hammer and tongs for one another. It was a busy time for us for some ten minutes."

"Ah!" smiled Mr. Riley. "Who won?"

"Drawn battle," exclaimed Tom, somewhat sulkily.

"I had a licking," laughed Jack. "It was a certainty for him from the beginning."

"Not surprised," came from the officer. "And the toffee?"

"Eh?" asked Jack.

"The toffee you accused him of stealing?" asked Mr. Riley. "You found it later?"

"In another pocket—yes," admitted Jack, with a delightful grin. "I deserved that hiding; it made us fast friends. So Tom's been impressed."

"By the machinations of his cousin."

That caused Tom to lift his head and come nearer. He had wondered time and again how that impressment had been brought about, whether by accident or design, and had never been able to bring himself to believe that José was responsible. Mr. Riley's words made him open his ears.

"You are sure, sir?" he asked.

"The commander has letters from your father with positive proof. However, things seemed to have happened fortunately. You are to be taken to Oporto after all, and here you meet with an old friend. Things couldn't have been better. Now I shall leave you both aboard while I go to get together a crew. We'll set a course for Oporto when I return, and ought to reach the place inside the week. Tom, you'll no longer be a sailor before the mast. I have the commander's orders to take you as a passenger, or, if you wish it, to appoint you an officer for the time being. How's that?"

It was all delightful hearing; and when at length the sloop turned her bows for Oporto, leaving the

frigate to sail away with her prize, and incidentally to carry Tom's letter to his father in England, the party aboard the little vessel could not have been merrier.

"You'll have to turn soldier yet," declared Jack to our hero, standing so that the latter could inspect his uniform, and indeed the young fellow cut such a neat figure that Tom was even more tempted than formerly. For Jack was slimmer and shorter than he, while the few months of training he had experienced had taught him to hold himself erect. A jollier and more careless ensign never existed. It can be said with truth that, had the fortunes of the troops in the Peninsula depended on Jack's wisdom and military knowledge, disaster would promptly have overtaken our arms. He was just one of those jolly, inconsequential sort of fellows, always skylarking, always gay and laughing, who go through the world as if serious subjects were not in existence.

"Hooray for the life of a soldier!" he shouted, knowing Tom's ardent wishes that way, and anxious to fill him with envy. "Who'd ever sit on a stool and sweat over books in an office?"

"I'll lick you if you don't stop short," growled Tom sourly, and yet laughing for all that; for who could take Jack seriously? "Who knows, I may be a leader of troops before you have cut your wisdom teeth? Who knows?"

Who could guess the future indeed? Not Tom. Not the jovial, thoughtless Jack. Not even the wise Mr. Riley, with all his experience of the sea and of the

men who go upon it. It seemed that Oporto would receive them in the course of a few days, and that Jack and Tom would there part. But within twenty-four hours of that conversation the scene was changed. Two vessels raised their peaks from the offing, and, sailing nearer, declared themselves as French. They overhauled the little sloop, in spite of a spread of canvas that threatened to press her beneath the water. And that evening Tom and his companions were prisoners.

"My uncle! What awful luck!" groaned Jack, in the depths of despair, as is often the case with high-mettled people when reverses come along. "No soldiering, Tom; no office for you. I'd prefer that to a prison."

"It's the fortune of war," exclaimed Mr. Riley with resignation. "For me it makes no great difference. The wound I received aboard the frigate has not improved, and, even if I become a prisoner, I shall receive proper treatment, which is impossible aboard this sloop. I'm sorry for you two young fellows."

"Pooh, sir," smiled Tom, "we'll give 'em the slip! Seems to me I'm not meant for Oporto yet awhile. We'll give 'em the slip, and then I'll take on as a soldier."

"Slip? How?" asked Jack, somewhat staggered, for the idea had not occurred to him.

"Depends; couldn't say now how we'll bring it about. But we'll manage it some way. I speak Spanish and Portuguese and a little French. If with

those advantages we can't manage the business, well, we're only fit for a prison.

"Hooray!" shouted the excited Jack; whereat one of the French officers accosted them angrily. But Tom quickly appeased him.

"Where do we get landed, *Monsieur le Lieutenant*?" he asked politely.

"Ah, you speak our tongue! That is good," came the more pleasant answer. "But where you land I cannot say; you will be sent with troops to the north of Spain, and so to a prison."

It was not very cheering news, but Tom made the best of it.

"I don't put my nose into a French prison if I can help it!" he declared, in that particular tone of voice to which Jack had grown accustomed when they were chums at school.

"And he won't!" declared the latter. "I know Tom well—a pig-headed, stubborn beggar from his cradle. Tom'll give 'em the slip, and we with him. One thing seems all right in the meanwhile—there's grub and drink in plenty. I never could stand starvation; I'd rather go to prison."

But whatever thoughts they may have had as regards escaping were set aside when they landed. Putting in at an obscure port, Tom and his friends found a squadron of horsemen waiting to receive them, for the ship had flown signals. The three friends, together with the two men belonging to Jack's regiment, were given horses, while a trooper

took their reins, two other men riding close to each one of them. And then they set off across a barren country, which, however fair it may have been in other days, was burned black, stripped of all eatables, while those villages which had not been swallowed by the flames were wrecked and useless.

"You will be careful not to attempt an escape," said the officer in command of the squadron, speaking to Tom, the only one of the prisoners who could understand him. "I have given orders for the troopers to shoot at the first attempt. We ride now to join our main army, and through a country inhabited by people who would flay us alive if they could catch us. Let that alone warn you not to attempt escape. The Portuguese peasants are more dangerous than my soldiers."

He shouted to the head of the column, set his own horse in motion, and led the way at a pace that threatened to be trying. It was obvious, in fact, that he was anxious to reach the summit of the hills near at hand, and not to be found in the open when night fell. As for Tom and his friends, the outlook seemed hopeless; an attempt at escape meant a bullet from their guard. And, even were they successful, they were in a country where bands of peasants scoured the valleys murdering all who were too weak to oppose them. It looked indeed as if a French prison would shortly shelter them, and as if there Jack's military career would come to a halt before it had actually begun, while Tom's ambitions in that direction would be cut in twain and end only in bitter disappointment.

CHAPTER V

Prisoners

If ever a band of prisoners could be described as jovial it was the little band with whom Tom Clifford was travelling. For the confinement at sea made a trip ashore most enchanting; then the quick and unaccustomed movement, the efforts more than one of them were forced to make continually to keep in their saddles, provoked an amount of amusement which even infected their escort.

"I was as near off as anything that time," shouted the irrepressible Jack, when his horse had shied at a rock and nearly thrown him. "Wish one of these fellows would rope me to the saddle instead of leading me as if I were a child."

"What does he say, monsieur?" asked the trooper riding near our hero, and at once Tom explained.

"That would not be good for him," laughed the man. "If we have to gallop at any time, and the horse fell, he would be left to be butchered. I tell you, monsieur, these peasants are terrible. I do not say that they are not justified, for our men have behaved cruelly to them. But the peasants care nothing whether it be horse soldiers or foot. If a man

of ours falls into their hands he is butchered; that would be your fate also if you were to lag behind."

Every now and again, as the small party made for the hills, groups of men were seen hovering in the distance. And once, when the squadron was riding through a narrow defile, rocks descended from above.

"Gallop!" commanded the officer, and striking their heels into the flanks of the horses the soldiers soon passed through. When the dusk of evening began to fall, shots rang out in the distance, and one of the troopers was wounded.

"I see men gathering in front of us," suddenly exclaimed one of the sergeants. "They fill the gap through which we must pass to gain the road for the hill."

"Halt!" came from the commander. "Place the prisoners in the centre. We will ride forward steadily till within shot of them, and then we will charge. There is nothing else to be done. To retreat would be to have the whole population of the country about us to-morrow; monsieur," he said, as if by an afterthought; "you and your comrades realize the danger?"

Tom nodded at once. "We see the position, *Monsieur le Capitaine*," he said. "You are a detached party away from the army."

"We are one of hundreds of squadrons told off to clear the country during the retreat of our armies across the Tagus," came the answer. "From to-day we march for Spain, and I hope we may never put

foot in Portugal again. It is not a pleasant duty, this burning of villages and crops, but orders must be obeyed. We are detached, as you say, and to join our friends we have to run the gauntlet. Monsieur and his friends can have temporary liberty, and arms with which to fight, if they will give their word of honour to respect me and my men, and hand themselves over later on as captives to us."

"I will speak with my friends," replied Tom at once, overjoyed at the proposal; for he could see easily that there was a strenuous time before the little party, and in the event of a reverse to the troopers the position of himself and his friends might be very serious. Armed and ready they would be in a different position. Rapidly, therefore, he explained the position to Mr. Riley.

"Agreed!" cried the latter eagerly. "Not that I'm much use either way. It takes me all my time to stick to this animal, let alone use a weapon; for I have only one useful arm. Tell him we agree. You men,"—and he swung round on Andrews and Howeley, the two men of the 60th accompanying them, "you men understand the position, no doubt. We are fighting for the Portuguese, and against the French; but here is a case where our friends will not know us. They will kill us with the others before we can explain. It is a question of self-preservation."

"Right, sir," answered Andrews cheerily. "We're game, and though it'll be hard luck to have to be-

come prisoners again, we see the reason. We give our word."

"Good, then," exclaimed the officer of the party with relief, and at once gave orders to his troopers to throw off the leading reins, and to hand each of the prisoners a sabre. To Mr. Riley he presented a pistol.

"For you, monsieur," he bowed. "If there is need, you will know how to use it. Now, men," he commanded, "we will ride forward in column of files, and when I shout, spread out into line. A charge should carry us through them. Gallop right through the village and up the road. Forward!"

Nowhere, perhaps, were there finer troopers to be found than those in the French army invading the Peninsula. Napoleon had, in fact, swamped the country with divisions of magnificent cavalry, with numerous veterans in the ranks, and under leaders skilled in cavalry work who had taken their squadrons into action many and many a time, and had won victories. The preceding years of this eventful campaign in the Peninsula had seen detached parties of French horsemen penetrating far into country held by Wellington's troops, or by Spanish or Portuguese irregulars; and while the former had taught them many a lesson, and had, indeed, shown the French troops that if they were brave, the lads from England were equal to them, there is little doubt that, just as Wellington and our armies had learned to despise the Portuguese irregulars, and those of Spain in particular, the French held them even more in con-

tempt. It was the detached bands of guerrillas, however, that did them the greatest injury. No wandering party of horsemen could bivouac without fear of having sentries and outposts murdered in the night. Sudden and ferocious attacks were frequent, and at this time, when the French were retreating before our armies, and when without shadow of doubt they had treated the Portuguese peasantry and townspeople with horrible cruelty, a detached squadron such as the one Tom accompanied was liable to annihilation unless handled with great skill. However, this squadron in particular and its officer seemed to make light of the difficulties before them. They were accustomed to the hatred of the peasants, accustomed also to see them take to their heels when they charged, and disappear in their mountains. It was, therefore, with a cheer, in which Tom and his friends joined, that they jogged forward in column of file, their sabres drawn and ready, their leader a horse's length in advance of them.

Tom rose in his stirrups and surveyed the enemy. Even through the gloom he could see that there must be two hundred at least gathered at the entrance of the village through which the squadron must pass to reach the road to the heights. Shots came from the mass every now and again, while there were red flashes from the buildings. Shrill cries of rage and hate reached his ears, and amongst the voices he could distinguish those of women.

"Phit! Phit! Bullets whizzed overhead, while the

trooper next to him suddenly gave vent to a growl of anger.

"Struck me in the arm, monsieur," he said, after a few moments. "I would rather far receive a wound in proper battle than from these wolves. But you will see; they will scatter as we charge. We shall cut down a few of the laggards, burn the village, and thus light our way to the mountains. Poof! The Portuguese are brutes, the Spaniards are gentlemen beside them."

That was the way in which the French looked at the nations in the Peninsula. Truth compels us to admit that they had reason for liking the Spaniards; for not only were they able to play with them as if they were children, utterly despising them as soldiers, but also they obtained real help from them in their campaign, and though England had sent troops to repel the invader, and to help the Spaniards as well as the Portuguese to rid their country of oppression, yet throughout the campaign the Spaniards in particular foiled the wishes of Wellington and his generals in every direction. They withheld supplies even from the wounded. They parted with nothing save at an exorbitant price, and always there were traitors amongst them ready to disclose our plans to the enemy. The Portuguese, too, were not guiltless in this matter; but, on the whole, their irregulars did some excellent work, and they at least made an attempt to help the British to drive Napoleon and his armies out of the Peninsula.

"Canter!" the command rang out loudly as a wide splash of flame came from the peasants, while bullets clipped the air, sang shrilly overhead, and sometimes hit horses or accoutrements. Tom heard a sharp metallic sound, and lost a stirrup, shot away by one of these bullets; but he managed to secure it again, though he was no great horseman.

"Form line on the left!" The command rang out, while answering howls and shouts came from the village. "Charge!"

Tom could see the commander standing in his stirrups, his sword raised overhead, his face turned towards his men. And that exhilarating shout, the excitement in the air, the bullets and the cries, sent his blood surging through him. Let us remember that Tom was young, and possessed of excellent health and spirits, also that soldiering was no new ambition with him. Fear for the future he had none, but all the while he was wondering how the matter would progress, and what would happen supposing the villagers held their ground and refused to be driven from the village. The hammer of the horses' hoofs, the jingle of bits and stirrups, and the sharp reports of muskets sent a thrill through his frame from head to foot, and in a moment he was leaning forward like the troopers, his sabre down over his knee, all eagerness to reach the enemy. Nor was it long before the squadron got to striking distance. The peasants held their ground till the horses were fifty paces away, and then raced into the houses. A

storm of bullets came from windows and doorways, and then, of a sudden, there was a clatter in front, and the commander of the squadron disappeared from view entirely. By then Tom was within ten paces of him; for the formation had brought him to the very centre.

"Halt!" he bellowed, seeing what had happened. "The road is blocked. The peasants have dug a huge ditch, and the commander has gone into it. Here—hold my horse!"

He flung the reins to a trooper riding at his knee, and slid to the ground. A moment later he was down in the rough and deep ditch which the peasants had made ready, and leaning over the unfortunate commander of the squadron found that he was dead.

"*Il est mort!*" he shouted to the troopers, making his way back to his horse at once.

"Monsieur, this is terrible!" cried the trooper who had held the reins. "We are being shot down rapidly, and nothing is being done to help us. The captain is dead and his lieutenant; I think the sergeants are also hurt."

The engagement, so far as the squadron was concerned, had indeed come to a curious and dangerous halt. The troopers sat bunched together, some of the men reining their horses back as if about to flee. Yet no order came. There was no one to give the word of command. It was then that Tom showed the stuff of which he was made. It is true Mr. Riley should perhaps have come to the fore, or Jack; but neither

could speak the language, while, in any case, it was the duty of one of the troopers to conduct the action. However, when no one comes forward, and men are being shot down rapidly, it is clear that he who takes command on his shoulders, and acts wisely, is a blessing to his comrades. Jack took the post without a thought. To sit still longer was madness, and quite impossible."

"Wheel about," he shouted in French. "Ah, they have closed in on us! We are caught between two fires. Forward, men, charge!"

He led them at the enemy at full gallop; but what could fifty men do against some hundreds? It happened that this squadron of horse had been watched by the peasants, and for two days past efforts had been made to surround it. The wild inhabitants of this mountainous region, burning with hatred of the invader, had been brought together, and gradually, as the horsemen retreated from the coast and got into difficult country, the net had been drawn about them. There were perhaps five hundred peasants in rear of the party when Tom faced them about and charged. A crashing discharge of musketry swept the ranks of the troopers, dropping a dozen of the men from their saddles, and then began a rush on the part of the enemy. It looked, indeed, as if the remnant would be annihilated, and slashed to pieces where they stood. Tom looked anxiously and swiftly about him, and perceiving a building on the outskirts of the village, a little to one side, he instantly decided to occupy it.

"Right wheel!" he shouted. "Now gallop to that building. If the door is big enough, and we can open it, ride right in. Forward! Clear the rabble coming towards us."

It happened that another section of the circle was approaching the scene of the action from the direction of the building towards which he and the troopers were now making, and these at once opened fire. But Tom set heels to his horse, and in a minute he and the men supporting him burst amongst the peasants, slashing at them to right and left, riding them down, and scattering them in every direction. It was exciting work while it lasted, and it had the effect of allowing the party a little breathing time. They rode up to the door of the building, to find it was a church, and in a twinkling the door was open. Up the five steps leading to it rode Tom, and after him came his comrades.

"Dismount," he commanded. "Draw your carbines and scatter about the place, to make sure that no windows or doors are open. Two of you stand guard over the horses."

It was pitch dark within the church; but a trooper quickly discovered a torch, and then some candles stored away in a box.

"It won't do to keep them burning," said Tom, thinking rapidly. "The light would help the enemy to shoot us; but we must have something with which to inspect the place. Ah, I know—Andrews!"

"Yes, sir?"

The big rifleman was standing stiffly at attention before Tom, his arm at the salute.

"Take the torch and this trooper with you. Go round; return when you have inspected, and report."

The soldier saluted again with as much briskness as he would have displayed had Tom been a regular officer, and went away with one of the troopers whom Tom called.

"Howeley!" he shouted.

"Sir?"

Like Andrews, the man was drawn up with the rigidity of a bayonet.

"Collect all ammunition, place it in a central position, and dish it out ten rounds at a time. Report the total amount."

"Yes, sir."

The fine fellow went off like a rocket to perform the task, while Tom called to the troopers.

"My lads," he shouted, "let us be silent; I have sent a man to inspect the place, and will post you all presently. Another will collect the ammunition, and give it out ten rounds at a time. Don't forget that we may be held up here for hours, and our lives will depend on the amount of cartridges we have. Now, I want two of you for another purpose."

Two men at once came forward. "We are ready, monsieur," one of them said. "For the moment we and our comrades look to you as the leader. Indeed you are a leader; but for your quickness and decision

we should be back there at the entrance to the village shot down beside our comrades."

"Then collect all saddle bags," said Tom, "pile them in a corner, and with them all water bottles. They are the most important. I'm not afraid of starvation; for we have horses here, and one of them slaughtered will provide us with ample food. It is the water that is important; see to it, please."

It was perhaps some ten minutes later that the defences of the church were ready. Tom busied himself posting men at all vulnerable spots, and then clambered into the tower with Andrews. It was quite a modest erection, some fifty feet in height, but sufficient to give a view over the village. Lights could be seen in many directions, while shouts echoed through the air. There was the tramp of feet also, and a dull mass over at the entrance to the village.

"They're gloating over the poor chaps they shot and knocked out of their saddles, sir," said Andrews. "It was sharp business; I was never in a brisker, and I've done two years of the campaign already. Came out in 1808, sir, and went home wounded. Beg pardon, sir, but what might your corps be?"

"Corps? Corps?" exclaimed Tom, mystified for the moment. "Oh, I follow! I'm not in the army, Andrews. I was on my way out to Oporto, or, more correctly, I was going to sail for that place when I was impressed and sent aboard a British frigate. We had that action with the French man-of-war, and you were released. News had come out to the frigate,

meanwhile, that I ought never to have been impressed, and so the captain sent me on in the sloop to Oporto. By rights I ought to be seated at a desk adding up long, dry columns."

Andrews gave vent to a gruff expression. "Strike me!" he cried, as if dumbfounded by the information; "and I and Howeley and all them French boys took you for an orficer. Anyways, sir, beggin' your pardon, you've done handsomely. It was a lucky thing for us that you took the command, for Mr. Barwood ain't fit for it. He got knocked out by the first bullet almost, and it was as much as he could do to stick to his saddle till we reached here. Mr. Riley ain't no better. If Howeley hadn't held him he'd have been left outside to be murdered. This here's a tough little business."

It proved, in fact, a fortunate thing for all concerned that Tom had taken the command. There are some who might express the opinion that he should not have done so, that it displayed an uppish spirit. Granted all that; but uppishness is just what is required in moments of stress and danger. The lad who is modest at all times, and yet who can come to the fore when circumstances urgently call for a leader, is a lad of the right sort, a benefactor to his comrades. In this case Tom had undoubtedly done the right thing, and, moreover, had done it well.

"It was real smart," said Andrews respectfully. "Beggin' pardon again, sir; there's many who would

have been cornered. To go forward was impossible, to retreat out of the question, seeing as there were three hundred or more of the ruffians behind us. This was the only course. It's queer to think that we, who are fighting for the Portuguese against the French, should be boxed up here in danger of having our throats slit by those who ought to be friends."

"It's the fortune of war, Andrews," declared Tom. "I'm sorry for the wretches outside. By all accounts the French hate them intensely, for the Portuguese have shown more spirit than have the Spanish. They have contested the rights of the invaders from the beginning, and as a result the French have burned their villages and treated them badly. Indeed I believe they have behaved with the grossest cruelty. As a result there are reprisals, and we are swept up in one of these, and are likely to have a warm time of it before we are free."

"It's bound to be an ugly business," admitted Andrews. "I can hear them coming now."

"Then we'll go to the men," said Tom. "I'll give them orders not to fire till I tell them. Of course I shall make an attempt to win over the peasants."

"Eh? How's that, sir?" asked Andrews. "What about their lingo?"

"You forget I was meant for Oporto. I and my family have had associations with Portugal and Spain for a long while, and my cousins are Spanish. I speak both languages, but not well, I fear. I always hated lessons, and now wish to goodness I had been

a little more diligent. However, I can make myself understood easily, and will try to win the peasants over."

They clambered down the long, rough ladder that led from the belfry, and went amongst the men, Tom warning all of them to hold their fire till he shouted. Meanwhile Howeley had reported to him that there was ammunition sufficient to supply each man with forty-two rounds. As for food and drink, to his dismay he was informed that there was little of either; so that it looked as if the contest could not last for long.

"We've just twenty-two men all told, counting yourself and the other officers," reported Andrews, some minutes later, saluting Tom as if he had no doubt as to his position. "Every window and door is guarded, and from what I can see of the troopers they are ready for any fighting. It's queer to think that we who were prisoners are in command, and no difficulty about it."

There was little doubt that the situation was more or less unique, and caused Mr. Riley the utmost amusement. He, poor fellow, had been struck in the ribs somewhat heavily, and lay in a corner, with Jack close beside him; but he smiled when our hero at length had time to approach him.

"My lad, you've done right well; you're a dead loss to the navy," he smiled. "I'm not surprised; after what I saw aboard the frigate I felt you would do something. Jack and I haven't worried you since

we got here, as we saw you wanted freedom to think and arrange matters; but we're glad now that you're able to spare a few minutes. What will happen?"

Tom stayed with them for a quarter of an hour, and now that he felt that he had done all that was possible in arranging the defence, he employed his wits and energies in seeing to his comrades. In the case of Mr. Riley, he, with the help of Andrews and Howeley, bound his chest very firmly with a couple of girths taken from the horses, first of all, however, placing a pad over the wound, which was little more than a contusion. For Jack equally simple surgery sufficed, for a bullet had penetrated his thigh, and, the bleeding having stopped, all that was wanted was a dressing and a bandage, and fortunately the troopers carried these with them. They had hardly made him comfortable when the lookout man posted in the tower reported that a mass of men were coming.

"Remember—not a shot, my friends," Tom called out to the troops, "and take care not to show a light. I will see to these people and try to win them over."

He scrambled up an ancient flight of stone steps and passed on to a ledge over the doorway, which, no doubt, served the purpose of a pulpit in fine weather. There was a dull roar of voices coming towards him, while the space between himself and the village seemed to be filled with figures. Ten minutes later a mob had drawn up in front of the church. Tom stood to his full height and hailed them.

"My friends," he shouted in Portuguese. "We are English!"

A fearful yell answered him. Shrieks of anger floated up to his ears, while a hurricane of shots swept in his direction. Amidst the dancing torches that many of the people carried there flashed out splashes of flame. The vibrating roar of voices which followed had in it an awe-inspiring note. Tom might have been on the verge of a rocky coast on which huge breakers were thundering in their fury. That note spoke of hatred, of an approaching triumph, of a horrible gloating on the part of the peasants. It told better than individual words could do what were the intentions of the enemy, what would be the fate of the besieged if they fell into their hands. Then, of a sudden, catching a better view perhaps of the solitary figure above them, the mob became silent.

"My friends," called Tom, his tones clear, not a whimper in his voice, "you have made an error. There are five Englishmen amongst this party, five friends of the Portuguese. Let someone come forward to identify us."

There might have been a mob of wild beasts outside by the answer. The crowd, thinking no doubt that one of the Frenchmen was attempting to fool them, and rob them of a prey they now counted upon as their own, shrieked aloud and came surging forward. More shots rang out, stones were thrown; and then, with a loud crash, the leaders came against the

door of the church. Tom clambered down to his men, stern and pale and determined.

"Post three of them up on the ledge," he told Andrews, who was a valuable help to him. "Let others fire through the windows when I shout. Don't fire till then."

He repeated the words in French, and then waited till there came a stunning blow upon the door, a blow which shook it to the hinges and threatened to throw it down. It was clear, in fact, that the mob outside were longing to get at the troopers. Shouts and oaths could be heard, while the clatter of firearms was incessant.

CHAPTER VI

Napoleon the Ambitious

WITHIN the village church in which the French troopers and their one-time English prisoners had taken refuge under Tom Clifford's guidance there was a deathly silence while the mob outside shrieked and shouted. Not one of the defenders but knew what fate awaited them if once the enemy beat in the doors, and knowing that they listened as blow after blow thundered upon the woodwork, shaking the doors till they threatened to fall down.

"Andrews," shouted Tom, who had been listening acutely like the rest, and wondering what action he ought to take, "light up one of the torches and take a couple of men with you. We want something to place behind the doors, for in a little while they will be beaten in. Meanwhile I will try again to pacify the peasants."

It was a forlorn hope, and yet worth trying. Tom, therefore, clambered up the steep flight of stone steps again, while Andrews went off to do his bidding. Stepping past the three men who had ascended to the ledge above the crowd our hero once more stood to his

full height and shouted to attract the attention of the peasants. And once more his coming was the signal for an outburst of shouts, shrieks, groans, and hisses which might well have appalled a brave man. Muskets flashed in the semi-darkness, for night had now come, while here and there torches flamed over the heads of the people. Bullets spattered and broke against the stonework about him, thudding heavily, even splashing him with portions of lead. One enthusiast, in fact, as if driven frantic by the sight of his person, made a vain attempt to clamber up the ledge, and, missing his footing, fell back upon the crowd, his coming setting rise to oaths and shouts of anger. Then there fell a sudden silence while a brawny giant, a blacksmith no doubt, stepped from under the archway of the door, a huge hammer over his shoulder, showing that it was he who had been delivering those smashing blows on the door.

"People of Portugal," Tom called out loudly, "I have come again to speak to you. You fight with friends, not with enemies."

The howl that followed would have scared even a veteran.

"Friends! You say friends!" shouted the blacksmith, stepping still farther out from the arch, while a couple of torches near him illuminated his person. "Who are you that you should try to fool us? We know our business well enough. For days we have watched this troop of horse, and for days we have vowed to kill every man of them, to kill them slowly

if we may. Who are you, speaking our tongue, who dare to say that you are friends?"

Shouts of applause greeted the words. An excited individual near the speaker levelled a pistol and fired point-blank at Tom, narrowly missing his head. Then once more there was silence. The crowd, in fact, seemed to have realized their own power now, and knew well that the church was surrounded. Eager though they were to slaughter the troopers, they did not grudge a few moments' delay.

"Who are you?" they shouted hoarsely.

"I am English," answered Tom at once, "and so are four others amongst us. We were being carried as prisoners."

"A lie!" came fiercely from someone in the crowd. "If he and the four beside were prisoners, why then were they armed? Why did they fight us at the entrance to the village?"

The argument was greeted with roars of applause again, which silenced all Tom's efforts. Then the blacksmith held his hammer aloft to command silence, and, having obtained it, seized a torch and held it high up toward our hero.

"Listen, friends and brothers," he called in hoarse tones. "There is one above who speaks our tongue and tells us that he and four others are English and therefore friends. Good! Let us say that this is no lie. There are four, while we are four hundred. Let these four, with the one who speaks to us, come out from the church. If their tale is true they shall

live and we will feed and house them. If they lie——"

The sentence was broken by discordant shouts of glee at the blacksmith's wit, shouts that boded ill for anyone foolhardy enough to place himself in the hands of such people, so roused by events, and mad for slaughter, that they were incapable of recognizing friend from foe.

"Let the five come out to us," shouted the blacksmith, "leaving the others to be dealt with as we will."

Tom waited for the noise which followed to die down, and then bent over the crowd. "What you ask is impossible," he said firmly. "I and my English friends will not desert the troopers. But we are ready to hand ourselves over to a body of English troops when you bring them to us. To you we will not trust ourselves, and I warn you that efforts on your part will lead to the death of many. Now, be wise; reflect on the consequences and leave us alone."

Had he wished to stir the rage of the peasants Tom could not have done it more effectually. Screams of rage filled the air, while a torrent of bullets sped toward him. He stepped back from the ledge, clambered down the stairs, and seized a carbine and ammunition.

"My friends," he said in French, "those wolves outside ask for our lives. We will sell them dearly. Let each man fire the moment the attack begins,

remembering to make each shot tell, for ammunition is very scarce. Ah, is that you, Andrews?"

"Yes, sir," came the answer, while the rifleman drew himself up stiffly in front of our hero, a lighted torch still in one hand. "There are pews, which we might break up," he reported; "but they're light, too light to be of use in a doorway. But one of the horses is dead, sir. If we were to pull him along here he'd make an obstacle they'd have difficulty in moving."

"A horse!" the novel idea startled Tom. And then, on consideration, it appeared that nothing could be better. At once he sent Andrews off with four of the men to drag the animal towards the door, while he himself took the candle, and, striding over to the pews that filled the floor of the church, closely inspected them. A scheme for saving ammunition was growing in his brain; for it was clear that if the enemy persisted in an attack the wherewithal to load the muskets would soon be expended.

"The doors will be broken down in no time," he told himself; "then we shall be separated from the peasants merely by the barrier we happen to place in position—a horse on this occasion. What we want is something long with which to keep them at a distance."

Calling two of the troopers, he urged them to break up half a dozen of pews as swiftly as possible, keeping the long timbers intact.

"Use your sabres," he said, "and when you have

the timbers separated, point them at one end. I want a couple of dozen spears with which to fend off these peasants. Ah, there goes the hammer again!"

A terrific blow resounded upon the door, which was followed almost immediately by a sharp report from the ledge above, and then by a howl. The blacksmith had not lived to see the triumph that he had anticipated. One of the French troopers had leaned over and shot him with his carbine. But the shot made little difference. A dozen infuriated peasants sprang forward to seize the hammer, while shots came from all directions. Then, amidst the sounds, steps were heard on the narrow staircase leading from the ledge.

"Monsieur," said the man, running up to Tom, "there are men bringing masses of straw to pile against the door. My comrades have discovered a gallery leading from the ledge, with steps at the far end. There is a large room also, and much building material there. It seems that at one time the church was larger. Will monsieur sanction the tossing of stones on the heads of the enemy?"

Tom nodded promptly, his features lighting up. By the aid of the flickering torch the trooper was able to see that the young fellow who had so suddenly taken command of the party was actually smiling.

"*Ma foi!*" he exclaimed *sotto voce*, "but the Englishman cares nothing for this trouble! He is the one to lead."

"I will come up as soon as I am able," said Tom,

"Meanwhile, do as best you can. Toss anything on their heads, but, above all, save ammunition."

The man was gone in a moment, while blows again sounded on the door, one more violent than any which had preceded it shattering the upper hinges. The shouts of triumph which burst from the peasants were followed by a couple or more dull thuds, as if heavy bodies had been dropped on the heads of the attackers, and then by a chorus of shrieks denoting hatred and execration. Meanwhile a stir in the church told of men struggling at some task, and presently Andrews appeared with his helpers, and behind them the carcass of a horse.

"He fell dead in a hollow leading to a doorway," explained Andrews in short gasps, "and to bring him here we had to drag him up a couple of high steps. Once on the main floor of the church the carcass slid easily enough; but earlier—my word it was hard work! There! the carcass fills the lower part of the doorway, and as the legs are in this direction those brutes will have nothing to take a grip of. What orders, sir?"

"Pull the pews out of their places and pile them one on another round the doorway," answered Tom, who had been sketching out his plans in the meanwhile. "You and Howeley and two of the troopers will take post on them a little to one side, and will fire into the crowd once the doors give way. The other men will be below you, and I am supplying them with spears made from the timbers of some of

the pews. You and they together should be able to keep the enemy off."

It may be imagined that each man amongst the defenders appointed to some task had laboured at it with all haste, and by now the men Tom had instructed to break up pews had almost finished their work. Indeed, within a few minutes, and just before the doors were burst in and fell over the carcass of the horse with a clatter, they had produced more than a dozen long pieces of strong timber, each one roughly hacked to a point at one end; and being some fifteen feet in length these improvised spears promised to be of great service. In a few seconds, in fact, they were put to a useful if somewhat unkind purpose; for the fall of the doors was the signal for a mad rush on the part of the peasants. The three or four hundred or more outside, howling about the entrance to the church, launched themselves promptly at the black void, where but a few moments before the flames from the torches had shown doors. A hundred struggled to lead the attackers where there was room only for half a dozen, and as a result they came surging on in a compact mass, which threatened to push the carcass of the horse aside as if it were a mere nothing. Then wiser counsels prevailed. Elbow room was given to those in advance, and soon shots were whistling through the doorway, while men armed with sabres, with pitchforks, with scythes and every class of weapon dashed up the steps and hurled themselves at the opening. Thud! thud!

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THE PEASANTS BREAK IN THE CHURCH DOORS

the stones came from the ledge above, striking the peasants down. The muskets wielded by Andrews and his comrades swept away the more dangerous of the enemy—those provided with firearms—while the troopers handling the long spears fashioned from pew timbers made effective use of their weird weapons. They thrust them at the enemy, giving terrible wounds. They beat them over the head till many dropped, and then advancing a pace or two, so that their weapons projected through the doorway over the carcass of the horse, they drove the peasants away from the entrance altogether.

"Stop firing!" shouted Tom, seeing that the peasants were retreating.

"We have taught them a sharp lesson, and that is enough for the moment. We don't want to rouse their anger further, and will try to show them that all we want is to be left alone, but that if they attack us we are fully able to give hard knocks in return. Anyone hurt?"

He repeated the words in French, and was relieved to hear that not one of the men had received so much as a scratch.

"Then we are well out of the first attack. Now we'll eat," he said. "We shall have to go on short rations without a doubt, and since that can't be helped we must make the most of it."

Leaving a man still in the belfry, and one of the troopers on the ledge, he posted two others at the rear of the church. Then he and Andrews, with the help

of two of the troopers, collected all the rations contained in the saddle bags, divided them into four portions, and finally issued a share of one portion to each one of the defenders. Thereafter they sat in the darkness eating the food, while, there being no news of the enemy, who seemed to have retired to the village, some of the men went to sleep, while others lit pipes and smoked contentedly. Tom sat down beside Mr. Riley and Jack, and devoured his own meal with an avidity which showed that excitement rather increased his appetite than the reverse.

"Splendidly managed, lad!" declared Mr. Riley, when he had finished the meal. "Not the eating of your rations, but the defence. Dear, dear, what a loss to the service!"

"Which service, sir?" asked Jack swiftly, for though wounded, and more or less incapable, the old spirit was still there. There was, in fact, a cheeky grin of enquiry on his somewhat pallid features, a pallor made even more evident by the flickering flame of a torch burning near the trio.

"Eh?" asked Mr. Riley, taken aback. "Which service? *The* service, I said."

"Army?" grinned Jack exasperatingly.

"I'll hammer you, my lad, when once you're fit," laughed the naval officer. "As if anyone could misunderstand me! I say that *the* service has lost a budding Nelson—a Nelson, Jack; as good a man as ever trod a deck. Tom's a loss to the service, now isn't he?"

"Army; yes, sir," grinned Jack, rolling his eyes at the naval officer.

"Joking apart, though," said Mr. Riley, ignoring the fun of the ensign, "Tom'll be a loss in an office. Just imagine our friend perched on a high stool battling with facts and figures, when he's shown he's capable of battling with people. Tom, I call it a downright sin. If you were my brother I'd say 'Go hang' to the office."

"Hear, hear!" cried Jack. "If Tom'd just give it up for a time and come along with us, why, I'd——"

"You?" interrupted Mr. Riley, with a smile of incredulity; for though Jack was undoubtedly dashing and gallant enough, he lacked the stamina and serious thought of one who leads.

"I," repeated the incorrigible ensign, "*I*—with a capital to it, please—I'd make the dear boy a general before he knew what was happening."

There was a roar of laughter at that, a roar which brought the troopers to a sitting posture, their fingers on their carbines. And then a smile was exchanged amongst them.

"*Parbleu!* but these English are proper fellows," said one to his comrade. "They come to us as prisoners, and we see at once that they are good comrades. They fall into the same trap with us too, and, having received arms, act as if they were French and not English. Now, one of them having saved the lives of all here, and having brought us to a nest which may be described as that of a hornet, they

laugh and joke and make merry. *Ma foi!* but these English are too good to fight with. It is the rascals of Spaniards we should engage with."

"Hear 'em!" grunted the rifleman Howeley, stretched near his comrade Andrews. "That 'ere Mr. Jack's a givin' lip to the naval orficer. Ten ter one he's sayin' as how the British army's better nor the navy. Equal, I says, all the time, though the army's my choice. Mate, who's this Mr. Clifford? What's his corps? He's a smart 'un."

His mouth went agape when the worthy Andrews informed him that Tom was merely a civilian, a class upon which Howeley had, in his own particular lordly way, been rather apt to look down.

"Civilian!" he gasped. "Strike me! But——"

"He's led us grandly. He's dropped into the post of commander as if he had been trained for it, as if it were his by right. I know all that," declared Andrews. "Tell you, my lad, he'd make a proper soldier."

Meanwhile Tom had faced the naval lieutenant eagerly.

"You think I'd do as an officer, sir?" he asked.

"Indeed I do," came the answer. "A regular could not have done better than you have done. You'll be a loss——"

"To the army," burst in the irrepressible Jack, grinning widely.

"To either service," said Mr. Riley seriously.

"Then, sir, I shall ask to join the army," declared our hero. "I seem to have been meant for it. This

is the second time that my efforts to reach an office have been foiled. I shall attempt to obtain a commission; then I'll see what can be done to help Jack to capture Boney and turn the French out of the Peninsula."

There was more laughter at that, laughter turned on the young ensign. A little later Mr. Riley dragged a paper from his pocket and slowly read a few lines to our hero.

"You'll be interested to hear what is happening," he said. "Bonaparte, otherwise known as Napoleon, sometimes also as the 'Little Corporal', or as the 'Little Corsican', Emperor of the French, now proposes to leave the Peninsula and march from Paris *en route* for Russia, which kingdom he wishes to conquer and add to his realms. Napoleon is not, in fact, satisfied with the whole of France, Italy, and other kingdoms. He desires to place the whole of Europe under one king, that king to be himself; to have but one capital for all, and that Paris; one code of laws, one currency, one language perhaps. It is Russia that now attracts him. To-morrow—who knows?—it will be England."

"But——" flashed out Jack, indignant at the very suggestion.

"Quite so," admitted Mr. Riley, stopping him with a smile; "but, as Jack was about to announce, there is always the service."

"Eh?" asked the ensign, puzzled for the moment.

"*The* service stands in his way. Nelson defeated

his navy in 1805, and thereby made invasion of England impossible. *The* service, please, Mr. Jack."

Jack was caught, and had the grace to admit it. "I grant you that Trafalgar was a tremendous victory, sir," he said. "But there's the army to be considered also."

"Right, lad," came the emphatic reply. "And well they have done too. See what wonders Wellington and his men have accomplished in the Peninsula."

"Tell us all about it, Mr. Riley," asked Tom. "I'm like hundreds of others. I know that Napoleon desires to conquer all within his reach, and is said to have designs on England. I know, too, that our troops have been in this Peninsula since 1808, fighting the battles of the Portuguese and Spanish, and with great success. But why should we not have left them to it? I suppose we're afraid that Boney will become altogether too strong unless we interfere. Isn't that it? I haven't followed the various engagements, of which there have been numbers."

"Then here's for a yarn," began the naval lieutenant. "Those peasants, poor fools, have left us alone for the time being, and as my wound is too painful to let me sleep, and this Jack seems to be eager for information, why, I'll tell you the tale, and mighty fine hearing it makes. To begin with, we hark back to the 'Little Corsican', the artillery officer—a commoner, you must understand—who,

by dint of sheer force of character and military and diplomatic genius, became Emperor of the French after that awful Revolution. Let us understand the position thoroughly. You have on the throne of France a man born in a lowly station. There is no long list of kingly ancestors behind him. Louis Capet, late King of France, was beheaded. The kingdom had become a republic, where equality and fraternity were supposed to flourish, and where the people were still shivering after the awful ordeals through which they had passed, scarcely able to believe that the days of the guillotine had really gone—those terrible days when no man, or woman either, knew whether the next day or so would or would not see himself or herself sent to sudden doom.

"At this moment Napoleon Bonaparte, a distinguished soldier, appeared upon the scene, and we find him in the course of a little time Emperor of the French, rich, all-powerful, and extremely ambitious. That ambition which might, had he wished it, have turned towards the path of peace, has been resolutely bent towards conquest. As I have said, Napoleon seeks to subjugate Europe. He dreams of a world power, with Paris as the centre and hub of that huge empire, and himself ruler over millions of downtrodden people. Doubtless England would have shared the same fate as other nations, and would have been overrun by French troops and mercenaries, had it not been for our navy. That is the arm, my lads, which has kept us free of invasion, that still

sweeps the seas, and keeps French transports from venturing across to our tight little island."

"Then, if that is so," ventured Tom, "why not confine our efforts to the sea? At Trafalgar we beat the French and Spanish fleets combined. Why then should we now take the side of the Spaniards?"

"A fair question, and easily answered, "smiled Mr. Riley. "Here is the plain, unvarnished explanation. You may say, putting sentiment and natural sympathy apart, that it is nothing to us that Napoleon has thrust his brother on the Spanish throne, displacing the rightful ruler; or if he subjugates Russia, putting a ruler of his own choice on the throne there also. You may argue that that is no affair of England's. But let us look at the certain results of such success on his part. He conquers a kingdom, and straightway has all the resources of that kingdom at his command. Its men are at his service, its fleets also; his armies and his navy are greatly increased in power thereby. Thus, first with one addition and then with another to this world power he seeks, Napoleon arrives at a point where he can destroy England in spite of her navy. There you find a reason for our actions, and for the presence of our troops here in the Peninsula. We fight to free the peoples here, thereby reducing Napoleon's power. We seize this opportunity because the peoples of the Peninsula will have none of Napoleon's ruling. The countries seethe with indignation, there are riots everywhere. Let us but drive him and his troops out of the Peninsula,

and Napoleon himself meet with reverses elsewhere, and all the downtrodden peoples he has already conquered will turn upon him. There will be a great alliance against this despot, and in the course of time, in spite of his gigantic armies and their undoubtedly fine organization, we shall wrest his power from him, perhaps even his kingdom."

That was exactly what England was striving for in those days. It may almost be said that a parallel situation had arisen to that which beset the people of England in the days of Good Queen Bess. Then Spain was a world power; that is to say, she owned amongst other possessions those American colonies that brought her so much wealth. The Gulf of Mexico saw many of her ships; her vessels, of enormous tonnage when compared with those of England at that time, sailed from the coast of Mexico laden with jewels and gold and wealth wrung from the natives, those Astec people who displayed such gentleness of character, such civilized habits, alongside of a barbarous custom of human sacrifice to which the world has seen no equal, not even in the days of King Coffee in Ashantee. Wealth can buy power; it purchases ships, and if there be the men to man them, then a wealthy nation can endow itself with a fleet which may be the terror of its neighbours. That was the position between Spain and England in those days. That Armada was preparing. It aimed at the subjugation of England, and the story is well enough known how Drake and his admirals set forth in their

tiny ships, manned by men who may be said to have been born aboard them, and in spite of the size of the galleons of the Armada, in spite of paucity of numbers and shortness of ammunition, contrived to break up the huge fleet when almost within sight of our shores. That was nearly a parallel situation. Now, instead of Spain, France aimed at our invasion, its Emperor Napoleon being ambitious to add England to the other nations he was bringing beneath his sway. Who knows what might have happened had there been no sea to contend with and no fleet? But we may fairly surmise that this country would have given a good account of herself, for already her armies in Portugal and Spain had chastised the French. Whatever the result under such circumstances, there was that sea to contend with, and Nelson and his admirals had so carefully watched it, and had fought so strenuously, that the fleet of France had been annihilated at Trafalgar. Thus the fear of invasion was gone for the moment. We had the future to consider, and, thoughtful of our own security and of the danger which would surely arise again so soon as Napoleon had brought Europe beneath his sway, we sent our troops to the Peninsula, there to oppose the man whose restless ambition kept the west in a state of turmoil, whose decree held thousands and thousands of men under arms when they might have been engaged in some peaceful occupation, and whose constant succession of skirmishes and battles filled the hospitals of Europe, sent thousands of maimed

wretches back to their homes, and crowded the cemeteries. That was the direct result of Napoleon's ambitious policy, of his aggression, and let those who hold him up as a hero think of the unhappy wretches who suffered pain, and whose cries of anguish are now forgotten. Let them remember the huge number of young men in the first blush of life who found a grave on the many battlefields of Europe.

But that was the position before Napoleon set his eyes on the Peninsula, determining to place his brother on the throne of Spain and so bring the entire nation under his power. It was this latter period which was of greatest interest to our hero, and he listened eagerly while Mr. Riley told of the landing of our troops in Portugal, of their hardships, and of the strenuous fighting they had experienced.

CHAPTER VII

A Tight Corner

"Now for our troops and the Peninsula," said Mr. Riley, settling himself in a corner of the old church and fixing his eyes for a few moments on the flaming and smoking torch which illuminated that part. "Those peasants seem to have decided to leave us alone for to-night, so that we have the time between this and the morning to ourselves. I imagine, too, that we may be congratulated; since it is easier for a few to defend a given place when they have daylight to help them. Ah, the sentry moves!"

In the dim light cast by the torch they saw the trooper whom Tom had stationed at the open doors of the place slowly rise to his feet and peer out. A minute later they watched as he levelled his musket. Then he seemed to change his mind, for of a sudden he dropped the weapon softly to the ground and gripped his sabre. And there he remained, in a posture that showed preparedness, for all the world like a tiger ready to spring. Nor was it long before he suddenly awoke to action; for there came a sound from outside the door, and a dull murmur echoed from the distance. Creeping silently towards

him, Tom peered through the doorway over his shoulder, and for a time saw nothing. Then, in the distance, he thought he could distinguish a dark mass between himself and the village, while nearer at hand there were two figures.

"Going to try a surprise," he told himself. "They have sent two of their most daring spirits ahead, and will follow immediately."

Promptly he crept away to warn the men, who by now were asleep for the most part; and very quietly they mustered about the door, while those on guard at the various danger spots about the building retained their positions.

"Gather about the door and pick up your spears," he warned the men in a whisper. "Leave the two who are creeping on to the sentry and Andrews."

The stalwart rifleman had already taken his post beside the sentry, armed just as he was with a sabre, and there, like cats waiting to pounce, they crouched. Peering out again over the carcass of the horse, Tom saw two heads appear, and then three more immediately behind them. One of the peasants almost instantly leaped on to the carcass, and was joined there within a second by a comrade. There was a loud shout from one, as if to signal to the mass behind, and then he and his fellow leaped into the church, while others appeared just behind the carcass of the horse.

"On them!" shouted the gallant Andrews. "Cut them down! Back with them!"

He threw himself at the attackers, and the trooper with him. For a minute perhaps there was a fierce scuffle, and then the two retired, as their work was accomplished. Both the daring spirits who had invaded the church had paid the penalty of their rashness and lay dead upon the floor. But the others were by no means disheartened. It appeared that a dozen or more had crept forward, and with loud shouts they now rushed at the opening.

"Keep them off with the spears. Don't fire unless you are compelled," Tom ordered loudly. "We've shown them that we are ready for them, and the less fuss we make about the matter the more they will fear us in the future. Ah, here they come!"

By now a surging crowd had arrived outside the church, and once more the scene of a little time before was repeated. Muskets and ancient firearms were discharged from every point, and in the most haphazard fashion. Indeed it may be said that in this respect the attackers were as dangerous to one another as to the defenders of the church. A hundred frenzied creatures hurled themselves into the doorway, and for a while it looked as if they would sweep all before them. But those deadly spears, harmless though they looked on a casual inspection, did the work expected of them. Men were tossed back with jagged wounds in the chest. Others were felled with blows over the head, while in many instances the attackers were pushed away by sheer strength. Then, at a signal from Tom,

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"TO HIS AMAZEMENT THE MAN CLUTCHED HIM BY THE HAND"

four of the defenders joined Andrews and the sentry, each armed with sabres, and fell furiously upon the mob. Shrieks filled the air; the maddened peasants dropped their weapons and endeavoured to grapple with the soldiers. They bit at the men and fought like fiends. Then some turned, pressing away from the door, but only to be thrust forward again by the weight of those behind them. It was a startled cry from someone in the background which at length caused the mob to retire; a sudden panic seemed to seize them and in a little while they were racing pell pell mell from the building.

"Now go back to your corners and sleep," said Tom. "We have taught them another lesson, and next time they will not be quite so bold. Let us have a look at these fellows."

He took the torch and leaned over the two men who had been cut down by Andrews and the trooper. They were powerful fellows, armed with billhooks and had their boots thickly wrapped with straw so as to deaden the sound of their coming.

"Put them outside," he ordered, "and to-morrow, at the first streak of dawn, we will send out a party to remove the other bodies. We may be cooped up here for a week, and things would then become unpleasant. That reminds me; there's the question of food and water. Well, that must settle itself; we'll wait for morning."

There was nothing else to be done; therefore, having posted his sentries, and cautioned them to be

very watchful, Tom retired to the corner in which he had left Mr. Riley and Jack.

"A nice little skirmish, Tom," said the former. "By the time you join the army you'll have become a veteran. These little conflicts are all good practice, for if I am not mistaken the peasants will make tremendous efforts when the day comes. But sit down. I'm eager to tell my tale before another disturbance comes. Where was I? Oh, I remember! We were talking of the troops in the Peninsula. You understand that Napoleon's armies were massed at this time in both Portugal and Spain. Well, Wellington —then Sir Arthur Wellesley—sailed from Cork in July, 1808, with some ten thousand men, and landed near Oporto. An experienced general such as he was, one, too, fresh from conquests in India, was not likely to let the grass grow beneath his feet, and almost at once he had a nice little skirmish with the French at Brilos and at Rolica, causing Laborde, their commander, to withdraw.

"He would have pushed on at once without a doubt, but information now reached him that General Anstruther had landed at Peniche, and, it being important to join hands with him, he left Laborde for the moment and marched to meet the new arrivals. Almost at once General Sir Harry Burrard appeared upon the scene, with orders from the Home authorities to take the chief command; for these authorities were for ever changing their minds. You observe that they send Wellesley to the Peninsula, a general with a great

and recent reputation, and replace him within a few days by a second general, who, however skilled, had certainly not the experience of the brilliant officer first selected. At this time the British force was encamped at Vimeiro, and a fierce engagement followed, forced upon our troops by the French, and arising at that point where Wellesley's own particular command was located. He beat the French handsomely, after a fierce engagement in which both sides fought most gallantly, and having done so, and received the congratulations of Sir Harry Burrard, Wellesley promptly found himself the third in command instead of the second; for Sir Hugh Dalrymple now arrived to take command of the invading force, thus displaying a further change of policy on the part of the vacillating Ministry then in charge of our affairs.

"And now we must switch off from the forces engaged in and about Oporto," said Mr. Riley, hitching himself a little higher in his corner and crossing his legs for greater comfort. "We come to the doings of Sir John Moore, a commander who won the esteem of Napoleon himself, and whose memory will be ever honoured amongst the French. And just let me digress for a moment. It is perhaps a most suitable opportunity, too, for bringing the matter forward, seeing that we are here prisoners in a sense of the French, and yet, if I make no mistake, in command of them."

He smiled quizzingly at Tom, and laughed aloud when the latter coloured.

"I—I couldn't well help it, sir," stuttered our hero, as if ashamed of his action. "You see, there we were in a hole, and——"

Mr. Riley's laughter cut short the speech.

"I was only poking fun, lad," he smiled. "We all bless you for your gallant intervention. But let me mention this matter. It is an opportune moment, I say. I was speaking of Sir John Moore, and the honour the French had for him. Look at the position throughout. Lads, we are fighting gentlemen, that is the consensus of opinion amongst officers and in the ranks. The French have fought us right gallantly. They at least are open enemies, but the Spaniards, for whose help we are here, disgust us. There are times, I hear, when our troops wish matters were different, and the Spaniards the real enemies, and sometimes the Portuguese also, for they pretend friendship, while everywhere there are traitors, everywhere men in authority amongst them—nobles and others who form the Juntas or Parliaments which govern the countries now—who oppose the men who have come to free their countries in every possible way, who are mean and contemptible in their dealings with them, whose policy changes from day to day and who appear at times to act as if they wished the French to remain victorious. There! I have had my growl. Napoleon is a great man, no doubt, with dangerous ambitions, dangerous, that is to say, to the nations surrounding France. The French officers and men, I repeat, are

gentlemen, with whom it is an honour to cross swords. Now let me get to the subject of Sir John Moore and his unlucky army of penetration."

"And the retreat, which has become famous," said Jack, becoming serious for a moment.

"Quite so, and very rightly too; for the retreat which followed the forward march of Sir John Moore's army was conducted in a manner that has won the praise of all. He marched for Madrid on 18 October, with some 30,000 infantry and 5000 cavalry, all wearing the red cockade of Spain in their caps. And perhaps it will be well to tell you at this point that the efforts of our troops elsewhere in the command of Wellesley, or of the other generals whom the changing policy of our British Ministers had sent to conduct affairs, had resulted in an agreement with the French, whereby Portugal was evacuated by their forces and all strong places in that country given up to our men.

"Having mentioned that, I can now explain that Sir John Moore's army was to carry the war into Spain, and marching in the direction of Madrid to combine with the Spaniards and attempt to oust the invading armies of Napoleon. On 13 November we hear of him at Salamanca; and now we have an illustration of the weak and vacillating action of the Spanish Junta, combined with as equally blameworthy action on the part of Mr. Frere, our ambassador in Spain. Where the greatest pains should have been taken to supply Sir John Moore with accurate information

concerning the movements of the enemy, the utmost carelessness seems to have been the order of the day. As a result, Sir John was in the dangerous dilemma of not knowing whether the circumstances warranted his pushing on towards Madrid, or whether he ought at once to begin a retreat towards the coast or into Portugal. It was not, in fact, till an evening in December, when already the winter was upon him, that he had certain information that Napoleon himself was massing all his troops, and that in cavalry alone he outnumbered the British by 12,000. Such information set our troops retreating rapidly by way of the Galician mountains, and hot in pursuit marched 255,000 men, with 50,000 horses, while a force of 32,000 kept in rear and held the lines of communication.

"To describe the many incidents of that memorable march would require a length of time, and since we ought already to be asleep, preparing ourselves for trouble to-morrow, I will merely sketch the events which followed. For 250 miles our troops were harassed by the enemy's cavalry, and daily there were severe skirmishes between our rearguard and the French. Recollect that it was winter, and that the line of retreat passed amongst the mountains, where our columns trudged through valleys and over passes covered deep in snow. It is not difficult to realize the terrible work this entailed, how the cold and exposure and constant need for exertion told on men and beasts. One can readily perceive that bag-

gage animals broke down under the strain, and that presently the army found itself compelled to carry its own provisions. Add to the difficulties of the cold and snow and the mountainous route the fact that a horde of non-combatants accompanied the army, servants, grooms, wives and children of the soldiers, and one sees the possibilities of added difficulty and misery. Soon men and women began to fall by the way, as had the horses and mules. They lagged behind, wearied and utterly careless in their misery of the consequences. Frozen and starved they lay down by the way, and soon the snow hid them. And always a cloud of French horsemen followed, seeking every opportunity to charge, and dashing in amongst the stragglers and helpless. No wonder that the army dwindled. No wonder that its numbers fell away till but a portion remained. But still the retreat proceeded, and ever the gallant rearguard held the French at bay.

"On the last day of 1808 Moore quitted Astorga in Léon. On the very next, the first day of 1809, Napoleon entered the same place with 80,000 men, his advance guard of relentless cavalry being still in touch with our men. There the great Bonaparte remained, leaving the final work to the Duke of Dalmatia, and conceiving it certain that the whole British army would be exterminated. Well they might have been too, for here we have an example of what I have mentioned. Along the line of retreat, when the Spanish authorities could have, and should have,

made full preparations to supply our troops and followers with rations and all that they required, they did nothing to help. Even food was not forthcoming, so that our desperate and hungry men were forced to pillage the inhabitants.

"It is a sad tale, lads," said Mr. Riley after a pause, "but a gallant tale also, for Sir John and his fine fellows at length reached Corunna, with but 14,000 all told, but with their cannon, their colours, and their trophies intact. In fact they came to the coast covered with honour and renown, but starved and frost-bitten, and minus many and many a comrade. And there more fighting was necessary, for our fleet was not in sight. The battle of Corunna which followed ended in victory for us, but cost the lives of many gallant fellows, and of that of Sir John Moore amongst them. Then our troops embarked, the fleet having arrived meanwhile, and as they sailed away, there, above the citadel where Sir John and many a gallant comrade was buried, flew the flag of France, not at the summit of the post, but half-masted, in respect for one who had proved an able and a courageous leader. That, my lads, was another proof of the feelings of the enemy for us. If fight we must, Frenchmen at least have that generosity of feeling which allows them to pay honour to a brave enemy."

The naval lieutenant sat back once more in his corner, his eyes fixed upon the flaming torch. Tom looked over at the sentry, standing alert and without a movement just behind the carcass of the horse.

And straightway he wondered whether he would live to take part in such a retreat as that of Sir John Moore, and whether, should he be involved in such an affair, he would conduct himself as became a British officer. Then Mr. Riley's voice once more broke the silence.

"We have heard of the opening events of this Peninsula War," he said. "Napoleon's invasion of Spain, and his placing of his brother Joseph on the throne without the wish or consent of the people, had resulted in some passages of arms between the French and English which must have opened the eyes of Bonaparte. But it did not deter him. Following the embarkation of Sir John Moore's army, he ordered the invasion of Portugal again, and in a little while Soult, a famous French marshal, held that country right down to the River Douro.

"Once more I will sketch the events which followed. Wellesley, again in chief command, marched against the enemy, forced the passage of the Douro, in itself a most brilliant undertaking, and drove the French back into Spain. Following Marshal Soult, Wellesley crossed the frontier in June, 1809, with but 20,000 British troops, though he had some 57,000 Spanish and Portuguese soldiers to aid him, the great majority being merely irregulars. These latter were under various commanders, of whom I can call to memory at the moment Cuesta, the Spanish commander-in-chief, a useless person; Romana, Blake, and Beresford.

"At this moment the French were disposed as follows: Victor, with some 20,000 men, was on the Tagus. Sebastiani was in La Mancha with a force not quite so strong. Thousands were collected about Madrid, in Galicia, Léon, and Old Castille also, while there was a division of cavalry and 40,000 infantry stationed in Aragon and Catalonia. Their very numbers give you an idea of the almost impossible task imposed upon our forces. Wellesley, in fact, having entered Spain and approached Talavera, found himself opposed to Marshal Victor, who had King Joseph in rear, with Marshal Sebastiani's corps to aid him.

"We now arrive at the first battle of importance in the Peninsula campaign. Talavera is a name which will be borne upon the colours of many a regiment with lasting honour, for the fight was a fierce and desperate one, and our victory was won only after great losses. The battle itself was preceded by two engagements at least of some importance, in one of which 10,000 Spanish troops distinguished themselves by fleeing before they had come to grips with the enemy.

"Following Talavera, the smallness of our numbers and the utter failure of the Spanish Junta to help with supplies and material caused Sir Arthur Wellesley to retire over the Tagus into Portugal once more, where he went into winter quarters. But the movement had the consequences one would have anticipated. The French determined upon another

invasion of Portugal, when they hoped to drive the British from the country, and in 1810 they came in three columns, under the supreme command of Marshal Massena, with Junot, Ney, and Regnier as column commanders. Lord Wellington—for he had now been granted that title as a reward for his conspicuous services—retired in good order to the heights of Busaco, where a terrific conflict followed, the British troops successfully resisting the onslaught of the French columns. Then, finding his flank turned, Wellington retired to the lines of Torres Vedras, lines which he had been secretly fortifying, where he might, should the French come down upon him in overwhelming numbers, mass his men and still hold on to a portion of Portugal. There, in fact, he remained defying the enemy and covering Lisbon effectually.

"Thus ended the year 1810, an eventful year in the history of this Peninsula War, for it saw at its termination a thin line of British red opposed to masses of French troops who now held, not Spain alone, but even Portugal, right down to the heights of Torres Vedras, behind which Wellington and his men remained defiant, clinging to that promontory on which is situated Lisbon. In fact they were clinging tenaciously to the country, their fortunes seemingly rather worse than they had been, though a huge advantage had been gained, inasmuch as Napoleon and his hosts had learned that a few British troops skilfully handled were easily a match for them. Nor

was it likely that we would give up the conflict. The year 1811, the year in which we now are, began brilliantly. You may say that you are in the midst of renewed exertions on the part of that brilliant general who leads us; while before us there is an immense work to be done. Lads, we have to regain Portugal before we think of ousting the French from Spain, which will be a gigantic undertaking, with fighting in abundance."

Jack and Tom pricked up their ears at the news. Indeed we may say that the former had till now been filled with that vague fear which comes to the heart of many and many a soldier who is sent to join his regiment at war. He wonders whether his own arrival will coincide with the defeat of the enemy, whether he will arrive too late to take part in the stirring events to which he had looked forward.

"Then there'll be a chance," blurted out Jack, sitting up, and giving a sharp cry of pain, for in his eagerness he had forgotten his wound.

"For you to teach Tom, and help him to become a general! Yes," laughed the naval officer, "heaps!"

"And you think, sir, that I shall be able to get a commission?" asked our hero, with some amount of misgiving.

"I believe that if you manage to bring us out of this hole, and still evade a French prison, you will be offered one promptly," came the gratifying reply. "But let me complete my task. We enter upon this year of grace 1811. Let us look towards Badajoz,

on the River Guadiana, south of the Tagus. Soult advanced in this direction to open up communications with Massena, who was massed with his regiments on the Tagus. Wellington also advanced, and, leaving the strong, fortified lines of Torres Vedras, crossed the Guadiana, leaving Beresford with some 7000 British troops, and a large number of Portuguese, to invest Badajoz. Crossing the Tagus, Wellington now marched north towards Ciudad Rodrigo, whence Massena had taken his troops, and established himself between the Rivers Agueda and Coa, and within striking distance of Almeida, where was a force of the enemy. Massena advanced against him, and our troops at once took position on the heights of Fuentes d'Onoro, where a terrific battle was fought, resulting in a victory for us. The French abandoned Almeida, while Massena was recalled.

"Now we turn south again to Badajoz, for the French had retired to Salamanca, that is, the troops lately engaged with Wellington. Soult had been reinforced, and was well on his way to relieve the place invested by Beresford, and, as a consequence, the latter was forced to raise the siege, and though he could have retired he preferred to choose a ground for fighting and give battle. He took post at Albuera, knowing that Wellington was hastening to his help, his troops consisting of those 7000 British, and of Spaniards and Portuguese, the former commanded by Blake, whose arrogance and jealousy

hindered the commander not a little. It disgusts one to have to record that many of these allies proved worse than useless when in face of the enemy, and that but for the sturdy backbone of British the battle would have been lost. It was, I am told, a most confused affair, made glorious by the tenacity and bulldog courage of our men in face of terrible odds, and with the knowledge that those who should have aided them, and been in the forefront, were often skulking in the rear. The losses on both sides were huge, but the battle ended in Soult retiring, while Beresford gathered together his almost shattered forces as best he could, Blake, who should have helped, even refusing him bearers for his wounded. Thereafter the siege of Badajoz was once more entered upon, while one must mention a brilliant little land cutting-out expedition, where, at Arroyo de Molinos, General Roland Hill broke up a force of the enemy under Girard, capturing men, guns, and baggage.

"Barossa, too, is worthy of more than passing mention, for the battle was hardly fought by our men. You must understand that troops had been dispatched to Cadiz, where the Spaniards grudgingly gave them entry, and these sailed later on for Algeciras, where they effected a landing. Then, with some 12,000 Spaniards, under La Pena, 4000 of our men marched against Marshal Victor's forces. Here again we have the same tale of Spanish treachery, jealousy, and cowardice. That movement ended in the British troops being left almost entirely alone

to withstand the onslaught of the French legions. Yet, in spite of that, Barossa, where our troops were, saw Victor's ranks shattered, and added one more to the many victories gained by our gallant fellows in the Peninsula.

"And now I come to the end of my tale. Owing to the junction of the enemy under Soult, and those divisions in the north, Wellington abandoned the siege of Badajoz, and advanced to the Tagus. Thence he crossed in the direction of Ciudad Rodrigo, and once more took up a position between the Coa and the Aguida, discovering the countryside utterly swept by the French. The latest dispatches from the Peninsula have told of burned villages, of ruined homesteads, of starving and infuriated peasants. Detached parties of horse have ridden through the country, sweeping it clean as the French retired, and no doubt these fine fellows with whom we occupy this church have formed one of those parties. Bear in mind that they have merely obeyed orders. Because their countrymen have dealt severely with the Portuguese they may not have done so; and, in any case, recollect that war is a cruel game, and brings greater misery, perhaps, on non-combatants than upon those whose profession it is to fight. There! Out with the torch. Let's go to sleep. Who knows? tomorrow will make a second Wellington of our friend Tom, or will see us—er——"

Jack put on a nervous grin. Tom's handsome face assumed a stern expression. He felt that it was not

the time for joking, and, what was more, he felt that failure here would be a disgrace after the many brilliant battles of which Mr. Riley had been telling.

"We'll pull out in the end, sir," he said with assurance. "What we've done already shall be done again. To-morrow—or is it to-day, for it is past midnight?—shall see these Portuguese fellows scuttling."

The day, when it came, might bring about such a happy result. But then it might not. On the face of it, matters were desperate, for here were a mere handful opposed to crowds—crowds, too, incensed and filled with a dull and defiant hatred, which made success on their part a certain death warrant for the defenders of the village church.

CHAPTER VIII

Tom changes Quarters

HEAVY drops of thunder rain, pattering upon the roof above and upon the stone flags that surrounded the front of the church, awakened Tom Clifford at early dawn on the morning after he had led the French troopers to their defensive post. Not that the rumbling thunder outside nor the patter of the raindrops awakened him to a sense of his position. For our hero had been sunk in a deep sleep, which nothing had disturbed up till this moment. Now, however, the disturbance gave rise in his half-slumbering brain to a train of thought which was half-delicious, half the reverse. For Tom was back again in his home, beneath the shadow of that grand mulberry tree, with Father Thames flowing past the forecourt silently, swiftly, incessantly, as if ever engaged upon a purpose. Yes, he was beneath the hospitable and safe roof of Septimus John Clifford & Son, Wine Merchants, with Marguerite as his chum and close attendant, with the ever-faithful Huggins, his father's senior clerk, to smile indulgently upon him, and Septimus John Clifford himself to praise his efforts to acquire Portuguese and Spanish and French.

"Heigho!" he yawned loudly, stretching his arms wide apart. "Beastly stuff this Portuguese and French and Spanish," he babbled, still half-asleep. "Let's go out on the river, Marguerite."

Then a shadow crossed the horizon of this pleasant half-waking dream. A youth slipped into the arena at the far corner, a youth of olive complexion, whose thin limbs writhed and twisted incongruously, whose fingers twitched and plucked at moving lips, and whose very appearance bespoke indecision, a wavering courage, meanness, and all that that implies. It was José, Tom's cousin, and his image drew a growl from our hero.

"Always interfering and getting in the way," he grunted peevishly. "I have to watch him like a cat for fear he will illtreat his sister. Was there ever such a fellow?"

The train of pleasant thought was switched off at once, and Tom dreamed the scenes through which he had passed. His seizure by those rascals, his impressment, and what had followed. Then a second figure thrust itself into the arena, and swept across his sluggish brain. It was that of a short man, of middle age, prone to stoutness; clean shaven, with features which attracted because of the obvious power they displayed, features set off by a pair of wonderfully steady and penetrating eyes that spoke of firmness of purpose, of ambition soaring to the heights, and—yes—of a relentless spirit which strove at the attainment of any and every object at whatever cost.

It was Napoleon, Napoleon Bonaparte, the one-time Corporal, the Little Corsican, he who had attained to the throne of France, and now, spurred on by a restless ambition, sought to see himself emperor of all countries, ruler of Spain through his brother, now known as King Joseph, King of Portugal, and even the Lord of England. A crashing detonation brought Tom to his feet with a start, wide-eyed, and very much awake.

"What's that?" he demanded, scarcely able to believe even now that he had been dreaming. Still, the presence of the trooper standing sentry at the door, and his obvious freedom from anxiety, reassured him. Ah, there was another detonation, and then a long-drawn-out rumble!

"A summer storm, monsieur," said the trooper. "It will be a fine day yet, and the storm will clear the air. It gets light rapidly, and in a little while we shall be able to see the pigs who have attacked us."

But Tom was thinking of something else beside the Portuguese peasants who sought to kill the little band of troopers, together with himself and his English companions. His thoughts suddenly turned to the urgent need of supplies. Water was wanted; it was running to waste outside.

"Andrews!" he shouted, and at the order the stalwart rifleman stumbled forward, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Howeley being close behind him. In the dim light of the coming day they drew themselves

erect as if by force of habit, and saluted, Howeley taking time by his comrade.

"Sir!" they answered in one voice.

"We want water. Hunt round to find some roof gutter and a tub, if there is such a thing. Get us a store somehow; it means life or death to us. I'll see to other matters."

He saw the two set off at once, and then clambered up the steep flight of stone steps that led to the ledge above the broken door of the church. Standing upright there, he looked out towards the village, and found that he could already see the nearer houses. But a mist was rising, which, together with the heavy rain that was falling, made seeing rather difficult. Then, turning sharply to the left, he entered the room which the trooper had reported on the previous evening. The man lay at the entrance, with a comrade beside him, both sunk in deep sleep. But at Tom's coming they rose swiftly.

"It was too dark to explore last night," said one of them, "but monsieur can see now that this is not only a church. There is a large building attached to it, perhaps the house occupied by the pastor. But it is empty, I think, for we have heard no sounds from it."

"Then we will investigate," answered Tom. "Stay here, one of you, while you," and he indicated the man who had spoken, "bring your carbine and come with me. It is already light enough to see where we are going."

Crossing the floor of the room, Tom found it lumbered with masses of stone and with builders' tools. It was clear, in fact, that some sort of work was in progress. There was an arched doorway at the far end that gave admission to a hall, or meeting place, from which steps led to rooms above, all scantily furnished.

"The pastor's house without a doubt," said Tom. "Next thing is to see what's underneath. A larder crammed with food would be more to my liking than any amount of furniture. Here's the stairway. It's dark; mind how we go."

Very carefully and silently they descended the stairs, and soon found themselves in a flagged passage. Doors opened upon it, and, pushing them wide in turn, Tom discovered living-rooms fully furnished, though the articles within were covered with sheets.

"A regular spring cleaning," he said to the trooper, with a grin that set the Gallic warrior smiling widely. "It's clear that the pastor has gone away while workmen have possession of the house. But—my uncle!—that's a larder, and here's the kitchen."

No one but those who have experienced it know the delight a soldier on service finds in the discovery of dainties. Rations are apt to pall after a while, and men long for the trifles which are commonly to be found upon the tables of those who lead a more peaceful existence. And here was a find. The careful housewife of the pastor, his housekeeper, or whoever

saw to his material wants, had set by a store at the sight of which Tom's mouth watered.

"My uncle!" he exclaimed again, running his eye along a row of preserves neatly bottled, and surveying a dozen hams hanging to hooks in a ceiling beam. "But—" and at the word his jovial face fell and lengthened till it was like a fiddle. "But they ain't ours to take—eh?"

The trooper grinned widely. He was an old soldier, and though he may have had his scruples, a limited diet for the past few weeks, and a gnawing at his stomach now, swept all scruples aside.

"Monsieur then prefers to starve with plenty beneath his nose?" he asked politely, drawing himself up and shouldering his carbine, so that the muzzle struck the low ceiling violently. "*Parbleu!* There is reason why we should eat these good things, monsieur. But for the pigs who hem us in, and for their hatred of us, we could step outside and buy what is required. That is so, monsieur?"

"Exactly," came the crisp answer, while Tom still surveyed the good things hungrily.

"But we cannot set out for the market. These pigs send bullets at us instead of food. That being so, *vraiment*, *monsieur*, surely here comes in a law of nature. To live one must eat. Here, then, is the wherewithal to obey that law."

The rascal grounded his weapon with a resonant bang, and put his nose within an inch of one of the hams.

"Ready cooked—meant to be eaten," he gasped. "Monsieur will——"

Tom's courage and scruples broke down under such subtle temptation. Besides, here it was a case of necessity. He took the ham from its hook, caught up a bag of dried biscuit, and then gave an inquisitive kick to a huge barrel, getting back a dull, telling sound.

"Full to the bung, *monsieur*—the wine of the country. Something with which to slake our thirst, and so enable us to defeat the enemy."

"Send for two of the troopers at once," said Tom. "Let them remove the contents of the larder to the room above. But, wait. Let us complete our investigations."

When they had at length been over the whole of the premises they had come to the conclusion that the house had at one time been a clergy house, and had harboured many people; for at the far end of the passage they found a door admitting to still more rooms, and then to an enormous yard, about which was a high wall. A pair of huge doors led from this beneath an archway, supporting a portion of what proved to be stables, in which were a couple of nags, while the eager trooper discovered stores of hay and corn in a loft adjoining.

"And a water trough and pump in the yard," cried Tom, delighted at such a find. "There you are, water in plenty," he added, working the pump and sending a gushing torrent pouring from the ancient spout.

The discovery they had made was, indeed, of the greatest moment; but it brought this in its train: it compelled the leader of the defenders to make up his mind whether to vacate quarters which had, so far, proved an excellent refuge, or whether to hold to them, trusting to procure provisions and water from the clergy house so closely adjacent. It was characteristic of Tom, perhaps, that before the trooper had time to ask the question, he had come to a decision.

"Listen," he said peremptorily. "The windows of this place all face into the yard. You saw no others?"

"None: it is as monsieur describes."

"And the wall outside the place, surrounding the yard, is so high that a man must use a ladder to ascend and descend."

"*Vraiment, monsieur;* otherwise he would be crushed as if he were an egg."

"Then we change quarters. Leave the ham and come along. Wait, though—get the key of the doors leading into the yard. See if you can open them."

The trooper dashed away, and in a trice came back, widely grinning.

"They were in the lock, monsieur," he reported. "All, in fact, was in readiness for us. It is clear that the Portugese expected our coming, and prepared us a welcome!"

"Stand by the doors: open when you hear our men coming."

Tom went off at his fastest pace, and was soon scrambling down on to the floor of the church. A glance outside told him that rain was still falling, while an occasional clap of thunder warned him that the storm was still at hand. But there were figures over by the village; half a dozen men stood in a bunch, and the light was now so strong that one could see that they were armed.

"Fall in," shouted Tom; and at once the men came tumbling forward, and lined up in front of him. Very rapidly, then, Tom told off half their number to fetch the horses. The others he again divided, posting three men above the doorway, four behind the carcass of the horse, while the rest were told off to carry Mr. Riley and Jack. Very rapidly he explained in French what he was about to do.

"When we have the horses ready," he said, "pull this carcass aside, and then let those in charge lead the beasts down the steps and direct to the left. Turn sharp to the left again at the end of a wall and you will come to a doorway; lead them in there. Now, hasten. Those fellows beyond there are merely waiting for the rain to cease. We shall be in clover, and eating a substantial breakfast, my lads—yes, for I have discovered a store of provisions—before the enemy guess what is happening."

Soldiers are not the class of individuals to be upset by surprise. A constantly changing life such as a campaign brings accustoms them to quick and unexpected changes. Moreover, here they had con-

fidence in the young Englishman who had so suddenly taken command of the party. There was, therefore, not so much as a question. In less than five minutes all were ready, while Mr. Riley was by then halfway up the steep flight of steps leading to the house. Andrews stood beside the carcass of the horse, the perspiration streaming from him; for he had raced round the church and inspected every corner.

"Ready, sir?" he asked.

Tom nodded.

"Then heave," called Andrews, tugging at one of the legs of the dead animal. The troopers threw themselves upon the carcass at once, and in a trice it had been dragged aside.

"Now out with them 'ere horses," commanded Andrews hoarsely. "Beg pardon, sir, but I don't know what you're up to. This is certain though: there's not a drop of water in the church."

"There's heaps where we're going," answered Tom laconically. "Heaps."

"And grub, beggin' pardon again, sir?"

"Could you eat ham, well-cooked ham, Andrews?" asked Tom, without a smile.

"Ham! Bust me——!" began the rifleman.

"And preserves. Perhaps the wine of Portugal wouldn't be good enough for you, though. There's at least one barrel of it where we're going."

Andrews' eyes shone with expectation. He moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. "Food

and drink, sir," he gasped, as if the news were too good. "Plenty of it, too. "Why—bust me!——"

He could get no further than that expression; it conveyed his whole meaning. But the eyes which looked Tom Clifford up and down an instant later had, if possible, just a little more respect in them.

"If he don't walk right off with the palm," spluttered the rifleman. "Here's he, a civilian—yes, a civilian—and he jest takes this little lot by the hand as you might say, and shepherds them. When there's trouble with the peasants, he sets about and gives 'em proper snuff. And when things is getting queer, and grub's scare, and water run clean out, why here he makes a man dance with news of hams—yes, hams he did say—and wine—why, it's Wellington hisself couldn't have done better!"

Two by two the horses went clattering down the steps of the church and out into the open. Shouts came from the direction of the village, while other figures joined those bunched together in the rain. Splashes of flame and loud reports showed that shots were being fired; but still the procession of horses came from the church. When all were out, there were, perhaps, fifty of the enemy watching and firing, while others came rushing from the houses. It appeared, too, as if they expected the troopers to mount at once and gallop away; for horns sounded in the distance, while men went dashing in all directions, as if to warn outlying parties to close in and surround the troopers. Perched now on the ledge over the

doorway, Tom watched as the horses were led along beside the wall, and saw them swing round the corner. He waited three minutes, when a trooper came dashing to him through the room which was littered with masons' tools and implements.

"Monsieur, all the horses are in the yard; the doors are shut."

"Then let two of you take charge of the forage, not forgetting that it must last a week at least. Feed the horses and water them."

"Mr. Riley's safe in bed in one o' the rooms yonder, as snug as ef he was aboard his own ship, sir," reported Howeley, arriving on the scene now, and grinning his delight. "Mr. Barwood's ditto, a cussin', sir, 'cos he says as he's fit fer duty."

"Feed them," answered Tom. "You'll find the larder below; take charge of it, Howeley. I make you responsible for all it contains; but carry something to the two officers promptly. Now, Andrews," he said, as that worthy came towards him, "let's clear the church of all our traps. There are saddle bags and other things to bring with us; there's the ammunition also."

"Cleared, sir," reported the rifleman, delight showing in every feature. "I thought as you'd enough and too much to see to, and so I give them Frenchies orders. They're quick to hop, are them froggies. It's friends, not enemies, we ought to be. But the church is clear, sir; there's a dead horse left, and a few of the peasants as was too inquisitive."

"Then we'll get to breakfast," said Tom heartily. "You've recalled the man from the tower?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then post one of the troopers on this ledge, and come along. Something to eat will put us all in a good temper and fit us for the trouble that's brewing. Those peasants don't seem yet to have gathered what we are up to. But, in a little while, when they have guessed at our move, they'll be swarming this way. Here we are. Across this hall and down the stairs. Ah, there's Howeley—well?"

"Taking food to the orficers, sir," grinned the latter, appearing in the doorway of the larder with some fine slices of ham and a jug of wine, while a second plate was loaded with biscuit. "There's a store here, sir, as would make the whiskers of a commissariat serjeant curl, sir—so it would! There's ham, biscuit, jam, cheese, flour, and what not. This here ruction's put us into clover."

It took perhaps half an hour for Tom's party to settle down in their new quarters; because, first of all, there were the wounded officers and the horses to attend to. For the former Howeley had already done service, so that when Tom, relieved of all immediate anxiety, went upstairs to them, he found his two comrades stretched on a pair of comfortable beds, the naval lieutenant brimming over with good humour, and Jack just swallowing his anger at the sight of the food which the rifleman had brought.

"Of all the wretched bits of luck I ever struck this

is the worst," he declared, managing, however, to bury his teeth in a fine, thick slice of ham. "Here am I, crocked up because of a bullet fired by some peasant fool from a blunderbus, and you, Tom, having all the fun. It's wretched luck; everything's wrong. Why, there's not even——"

What his next grumble would have been it is difficult to imagine, but Mr. Riley cut him short with loud laughter.

"Everything's wrong, Tom, my lad," he laughed heartily, holding up a slice of ham as big as that held by Jack. "Here we are, stretched on wretchedly comfortable beds, when we ought to be lying on stone flags which are really helpful when a man wishes to sleep. And we've grub too—grub, when we ought to be without rations. But the most serious part of the whole affair is that while we've really quite decent ham to eat, fair wine to drink, and hard biscuit to chew, we've no mustard to go with the ham. I protest, sir! It's a real hardship."

That set them all laughing, till the gallant lieutenant choked and became crimson, and put his hand to his side with a cry of pain. Jack sat up, his eyes shining, his teeth occupied with another bite. Howeley, ever mindful of discipline, stood rigidly at attention, his jaws moving from side to side as he strove to prevent himself from joining in the merriment.

"Well, I'm hanged!" was all that Jack could at length deliver himself of. "This is clover! Have some, Tom?"

They made a merry meal there, our hero seated on the edge of Jack's bed; and much they enjoyed the fare which good fortune had provided. Howeley, meanwhile, with Andrews and the rest of the men were discussing an equally satisfying meal, the first-named having, at Tom's wish, taken over the supply department. Horses had by then been watered, and were now tied to rings ranged along the wall of the yard, munching contentedly at heaps of hay placed at their heads for them.

"*Sapristi!* But I never saw the like before," ventured one grizzled trooper, taking to his pipe when he had finished his own meal, and levelling his remarks at Andrews. "Never before!"

"Right!" ejaculated Andrews. "*Très bien!*" for he had picked up an odd word or two of the language. "Proper sort, ain't he?"

"*Mais*, he is remarkable," went on the man in his own language, since he knew no other. "See us yesterday. We are surrounded. We are hemmed in by a thousand wild beasts; our captain is killed; our serjeants are biting the dust. We ourselves are like lost sheep. And he, this youth, he leads us to the church, where there is nothing—nothing, mark you, comrade, but stone walls and floors. Now look at us! We live in luxury. The horses are content. This youth laughs with his comrades as if a Portuguese cut-throat did not exist, and as if the British army was within hearing. He is a second Bonaparte."

It was praise of our hero, coming from the lips of

a Frenchman, and Andrews endorsed the remarks with vehemence. Not that he understood what was said. He gathered merely that compliments were flying with regard to our hero, and stanchly supported him.

"He's a toff, he is," he answered, stretching himself at his ease, and drawing at his pipe. "A chip of the old block. He's jest British to the backbone, from the soles of his feet right up to the crown of his head. I'll punch the face of any as dares to say that I'm a liar."

The threat was accompanied by a gleam of the eye that had warned enemies of the riflemen before then; and the Frenchman, with the quickness and perception of his race, must have followed closely, for he jerked himself nearer the rifleman in his enthusiasm, gripped him by both hands, and would have embraced him, had not Andrews, with true British dislike of a scene of such a description, put him firmly aside.

"None o' yer monkey tricks fer me," he called out. "But I'm with you all the while. Here's my hand on it."

At that moment a loud report aroused the garrison. Tom appeared at the entrance to the courtyard, and at once, as if by agreement, the troopers formed line, and drew themselves up as if for an inspection. Tom emerged into the courtyard at once—for the rain had ceased now for some while—and slowly inspected his men.

"We've had a good breakfast," he said, with a smile which went far to put heart into the troopers. "Now we've to work for the next meal. The peasants are approaching. We must get to our stations; and remember, please, fire as seldom as possible. This siege may last a week yet, so ammunition is most important. An hour ago water and food were most in request; you have both now. Then look carefully after the only other commodity that matters."

They broke their ranks at once, and went to their stations, for each had been allotted one. Two men stood guard on the ledge above the doorway of the church, crouching so that those below could not see them. The room behind contained half a dozen more figures, with Andrews to command them. Elsewhere, in the room over the doorway leading into the courtyard were Howeley and three men, while the remainder watched from the upper windows which faced the yard, ready at a call to go in either direction.

As for the enemy, they appeared in swarms, tramping from the village, armed with every sort of weapon. Crouching on the ledge above the church door Tom watched their approach with some amount of curiosity, wondering what they would do, and whether they suspected the change which had taken place so early in the morning. Then he noticed a dozen men detach themselves from the mob, and move out before them. They halted when some fifty paces from their friends and laid down their weapons. Then they advanced again till within easy speaking distance of the

church door. Tom at once rose to his full height, the sight of his figure drawing shouts from the mob in the background. Then there was silence.

"We come as a deputation," said one of the little band who had advanced. "We come to speak to the Englishman."

"I am here; what do you want?" answered our hero promptly.

"We bear a message. The elders of the village and the leaders of the peasants again make you an offer. You are free to leave the place with your four English comrades. An escort will be allowed, and you will be taken to the nearest camp. You may carry arms and your personal possessions. Refuse, and you shall be slaughtered with the hated Frenchmen whom we are sworn to kill."

"Then take my answer," called Tom loudly. "Two of my comrades are hurt, and cannot move, so that we could not accept your terms. Even so, we would refuse. Now take warning from me again. We have shown you that we can fight, and we are all the more ready for trouble now that day has come and we have slept. Go to the nearest camp and send troops to us. The Frenchmen shall then become prisoners. Those are the only terms we will agree to."

"Then you will not take freedom and safety for yourself?" asked the spokesman.

"I will not," came the short answer.

"Then you shall live but a little while to regret

such action. To-night we will hoist the heads of every one of you to the tower of the church. You are a bigger fool than I thought you."

He turned about with his fellows and retreated. They picked up their arms and joined their comrades, when a loud discussion followed. Then once more the forward move was continued, Tom and his men watching as a mob five hundred strong bore down upon the building.

"I see ladders amongst them," said Andrews of a sudden, peering over our hero's shoulder. "That looks as if they would attempt to climb the wall of the yard. Then they guess where we've got to."

The next few minutes showed that the enemy were fully alive to the situation. They steered away from the door of the church, a few on the flank alone advancing toward it. The remainder surrounded the yard and the house, and, a shot having been fired by one as a signal, all rushed in to the attack, the ladder bearers winning their way to the wall without difficulty, while a chosen band made an onslaught upon the doors which gave entrance.

CHAPTER IX

Hard Pressed

"STAND back so that they cannot see you," commanded Tom, as the peasants rushed madly at the entrance of the church that the troopers had defended so gallantly on the previous evening, and above which they were now stationed. "There is no need for us to risk their bullets yet. Let them climb, and then we will use our spears again and teach them that, if anything, we are in a stronger position."

The advice came in time to save many a wound without shadow of doubt; for while two or three hundred of the maddened Portuguese had swarmed along the walls of the house, and turning the corner abruptly had then made a fierce onslaught on the gate leading into the yard, or were endeavouring to clamber to the top of the wall, an almost equal number had selected the church door for their own particular effort. They came on at the double, brandishing an assortment of strange weapons, weapons which, though they were not similar to those carried by the troops, and had seen many and many a summer, and, in fact, were wont to be used more often in the peaceful employment of agriculture, were still capable of

giving terrible wounds, wielded as they were by men who seemed actually to be maddened by the sight of the defenders. The affair in which Tom and his friends found themselves so strangely and unexpectedly mixed was, indeed, one of those sad exhibitions of savagery to be met with, alas! in time of war, when such war is accompanied by atrocities. Knowing something of the history of this Peninsula campaign, and guessing at the rest, Tom could realize that the Portuguese peasant had suffered severely at the hands of vindictive troops who had been given a more or less free hand. The French bore an unenviable reputation for rapine, and history tells clearly that while the Spaniards had no very great cause of complaint, the Portuguese were often enough horribly treated. And at this time, when the French were slowly being forced in front of our armies towards the Portuguese frontier, driven in spite of their numbers out of a country they had sworn to hold, the atrocities committed were many. They did not stop at burning villages and ruining crops. Defenceless people were killed and horribly illtreated. Even the women and children were subjected to violence. And here was a direct result. One could hardly blame the peasants. Reprisals, terrible reprisals when the opportunity came, were but a natural sequence to violence.

"I have known these brutes waylay the rearguard of two battalions marching north, and capture everyone," said a trooper who was close to Tom, craning his head so as to see the mob from over the edge of

the parapet. "Yes, monsieur, I have known them to capture a hundred men, and when the news reached us, and we, a full regiment of cavalry, galloped to the spot, we found every one of our brothers murdered, done to death by torture. *Vraiment!* It made our blood boil. It makes us fight now till there is not a breath left in us."

Tom sighed. It was not often that he indulged in such a melancholy act; but the thing saddened him. In the midst of an attack it is true that he could forget the reasons for it, could almost forget the nationality of the enemy, but in his more serene moments he could not help but see the fact that these were but peasants, and that their rage and hatred were natural. Nevertheless, to allow them to chop himself and his little command to pieces because the French had earned reprisals was a very different matter. Self-preservation is one of the first laws ingrafted in us, and in Tom it was acutely displayed.

"Keep lower, my friend," he warned the trooper. "Ah! They have rushed into the church, perhaps hoping that we have left a comrade or two there. Soon they will try the steps, and then there will be a hubbub. Stand back, you men with the spears; and recollect, no shots, no wasting ammunition. Beat them back with the spears or with your sabres. Now, I will go to see how the others fare."

He left the faithful Andrews in charge of the party, and, passing into the clergy house, popped his head into the room occupied a little while before by Jack

and Mr. Riley. They were gone; it was evident that they had risen. Pushing on, he came to the windows commanding the yard, and there discovered the truants.

"What's this?" he demanded somewhat curtly.

"Disobeying orders," smiled Mr. Riley, while Jack looked his friend up and down for a few seconds, as if he resented interference, and then grinned widely.

"Never did see such a cormorant, sir," he said, addressing the naval lieutenant. "Here he is; he gets up a row with these poor peasants, bottles us in bed, and expects us to stay there. Not if I know it!"

Jack hopped on one leg to the far window, steadied himself there, and then slowly lifted a carbine which he had managed to secure.

"You go along and see to the defence generally, lad," cried Mr. Riley, slapping our hero on the back. "Jack and I couldn't be expected to stay in that room when such an attack was being made. You leave us in charge of this part of the defences, and even if we can't do much, we can at least encourage the men and see that all goes well. It will leave you free to arrange other matters. Ah! The beggars have managed to get to the top of the wall; they've failed once at the gate."

The attack on the latter had, in fact, been easily driven off; for the little room built over it projected a couple of feet beyond the face of the wall, and was provided with a wide door and a trap, while a wooden

crane swung outside. It was, therefore, a matter of no great difficulty to open the trap and fire directly down upon the attackers, while Howeley, the energetic commander of the post, had already contrived to gather a respectable number of paving stones from the yard below, and with these had beaten down the attackers.

"Made 'em hop mighty quick, sir," he said. "There must have been twenty dozen of the beggars, all as mad as hatters. But even mad people feel blows when landed on their heads. You can see what happened."

Tom peeped through the trap. Down at the foot of the gate were three peasants prone and still, while two more were slowly crawling away. At a distance of fifty feet there was a bunch of a hundred, eyeing the gateway with savage looks, and discussing the situation hoarsely. Then some went away at a run, returning in less than five minutes with a long beam.

"Going to try a battering ram," said Tom, rather scared at the sight.

"We'll give 'em battering," came the reassuring words from the rifleman.

"I've two men posted down in the yard with their carbines, and we've knocked a couple of holes in the gates. If we can't reach the enemy from above here, the boys below can manage. They've filled up their barrels with pebbles scraped up from between the paving stones. The shots will scare the peasants same as if they was birds."

A glance at the sturdy fellow showed that he had no fears with regard to his own particular defences, and, staying there a moment, Tom had full reason to trust him; for the mob outside were in such temper that delay was out of the question. Some fifty of their number began to fire at the gateway and at the trap-door above, while their comrades picked up the huge beam and advanced at a run, shouting loudly to encourage one another. Crash! went the end of the beam against the gates, shaking them severely. Then came the clatter of stones. Standing well above the attackers, Howeley and his two troopers advanced in turn, elevated a paving stone, took careful aim, and then threw it downwards. With a shout of terror the attackers promptly retired. A minute later, however, they came forward again at a run, and on this occasion a dozen of their number bore muskets. Stationing themselves in such position that they could fire through the open trap, they sent their bullets thudding into the ceiling of the room, making it impossible for Howeley and his men to take effective aim. Meanwhile the others ran in, and, picking up their beam, swung it backward in preparation for another blow.

"Jest you keep on tossing them stones over," commanded Howeley, as if the troopers could understand every word. "Savvy, me lads? Don't show up, but jest lift a stone same as this, standing well back, and heave it through. It'll hit something."

It did. A howl from below, and a chorus of shouts

and cries greeted the stone, while one of the men holding the beam fell as if struck by a poleaxe.

"Savvy?" asked Howeley curtly.

"*Bien!*" came the equally curt answer.

"Then jest you look to it."

Howeley went off as if he were provided with wings, and a moment or two later Tom heard him shouting to the troopers down in the yard.

"Jest give 'em mustard," he bellowed. "You've got that, me lads? Mustard's the stuff they're wanting. Let in at 'em."

A loud roar followed his words instantly, and then a second. Smoke billowed up through the trap, while a torrent of yells and cries came from the mob. Tom glanced over the edge, to find the beam lying on the ground and the attackers in full flight, save for those struck down by the slugs and bullets which had been discharged at them.

However, the fury of a mob is a thing to tremble at. The poor wretches outside came on again, bearing a ladder, and in a trice the latter was safely wedged in the open trap. Desperate men swarmed on to it, and it looked as if there would soon be a contest at the top. But Howeley's paving stones were irresistible. They swept the rungs of the ladder clean, and in less than a minute the ladder was tossed down and the frantic enemy was in full retreat.

"Well done!" cried Tom, delighted at the success gained in this quarter, but sorry, nevertheless, for the

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"GRIPPING ONE OF THE LADDERS DRAGGED IT ASIDE WITH ALL HIS FORCE"

peasants. "I can leave you here knowing that all will be well. What's that?"

He went racing back to the windows occupied by Jack and the naval officer, to discover that a commotion had suddenly arisen in the yard over by the far containing wall. The tops of a dozen ladders could be seen against the skyline, perched against the outside of the wall, while the broad summit of the latter was thickly covered with defiant peasants. They clustered thickly along the top, some firing their muskets at the figures in the window. Others had managed to drag up two ladders, and having dropped these into the yard were now swarming down.

"Into the yard!" shouted Tom at once, leading the way downstairs at a run, and dashing outside where the horses were quartered. He was joined by a dozen troopers within a few seconds, who all raced across the yard, their sabres swinging in their hands. One of their number, a light horseman by the look of him, outdistanced his fellows, and gripping one of the ladders dragged it aside with all his force, and sent it thudding into the yard with a couple of the peasants upon it. But a dozen and more of the latter had contrived to descend the second ladder, and at once there began a desperate hand-to-hand contest, pikes and scythes being opposed to sabres.

"Hold them, lads!" came in stentorian tones from Mr. Riley, in spite of his wound. "Hold them for a little, Tom. We'll have the other boys along in a jiffy."

Stamping with impatience because common sense and lack of strength told him that he himself was unfit to join in the mêlée, and, in fact, even to clamber down the steps, the naval lieutenant put to good purpose a stentorian voice trained in a service where lung power is required, and where the weakling is useless. In spite of the roar of the mob Andrews and Howeley heard him, and, rallying in his direction, went headlong down the stairs, with a number of their fellows with them. They arrived just in time to stem the tide of invasion. The ladder still remaining upright, and loaded with peasants scrambling to the help of their comrades, was thrown down by a couple of the troopers. And then, for the space of five minutes perhaps, there was a fierce struggle in the yard. The troopers at a shout from Tom separated themselves and formed a ring round the invaders, while the latter, taken aback now that they found themselves cut off from all help by their comrades, retired towards the wall, their scythes held well in front of them, their eyes furtively seeking for some hole or corner which would give them security.

"Hold!" cried Tom loudly, anxious to save unnecessary bloodshed. "You men keep your formation. Now," he went on sternly, addressing the Portuguese in their own tongue, "I give you a moment in which to lay down your arms, promising on the word of an Englishman that you shall not be injured. Answer."

With a sullen clang the peasants tossed their arms

to the pavement, and stood glowering at the troopers, fearful yet whether they would be murdered.

"Form into line, two abreast," commanded Tom again. "Howeley, just get to your post and tell us if the enemy are near. I'm going to eject these fellows."

He waited till there came a hail from the rifleman.

"All clear, sir," he shouted. "Them fellers has had a stomachful and has cleared."

"Then get below and make ready to open one of the gates. My lads," he said, addressing the troopers, who regarded their prisoners with no very friendly looks, "these men have thrown down their arms on my promise that they shall go unharmed. You will march beside them to the gate and stand about in case of a rally. Pick up your wounded and killed," he called to the peasants. "You will march straight across to the gate, and will pass out without attempting violence. Any man who disobeys will be killed instantly. Let this be a lesson to you. Go to your comrades and tell them that we are well able to defend ourselves, and that it would be better far for them and all if they left us alone. Now, march."

Looking forlorn and frightened, and regarding the troopers with eyes which showed even now, though rather cowed, their hatred of them, the peasants picked up their comrades, of whom a number had fallen, and bore them to the gate. Two minutes later they were gone, wending their way from the defences sadly, and in different spirit from that which had

filled them a little while before. Crash went the gate. Howeley threw the bar into position and turned the key.

"Well done!" came from the window above in loud tones. "Well done all of you!"

Glancing up, Tom saw the jovial naval lieutenant waving eagerly to him, while close at hand was Jack's grinning and perspiring face. He was actually shaking a fist at our hero.

"Lucky brute!" he growled in a voice so quaint, and with such queer grimaces, that even the French troopers could see the humour.

"Lucky brute to be able to hop about and take part in all these skirmishes. "Wouldn't I give something to be in your shoes."

"And right well ye'd do, sir, begging pardon," came from Andrews, whom the contest had worked up to a degree of excitement. "But it's well for us all that Mr. Clifford's here, begging pardon, sir."

"Well said," shouted Mr. Riley. "Ah, I wish to goodness I could talk French! I'd make a speech in Tom's favour. I'd call for cheers."

"Then here's three cheers fer Mr. Tom," came from Andrews in bellowing tones, cheers in which the troopers joined lustily, for they fully understood the gist of what was passing.

"And now?" asked Mr. Riley, wiping the perspiration from his face. "Now, Tom, after that precious near squeak?"

"Any damage done?" asked our hero at once. He

ran his eyes over the troopers, and soon discovered that four had been wounded, though, fortunately, none of the wounds were severe.

"Then pitch those ladders up against the wall again and look about for a strong plank. We'll make a bit of a platform above, where we can post a few men. They'll be able to keep others of the peasants from trying the same game. How are things passing at the church door?"

An inspection there proved that the enemy had retreated, though doubtless some of them were within the church. However, for the moment at least, the bulk of the mob had gone, and Tom took advantage of the lull to make his preparations for feeding the defenders. The kitchen fire was soon roaring up the chimney, while outside, in the yard, there was another blaze. A trooper, booted and spurred, and stripped to his shirt, bent over a huge basin perched on a low wooden table, and sturdily pummelled a mass of dough. Near at hand stood another, stripped like his fellow, thrusting his long moustaches upward toward his eyes.

"*Nom de nomme*, but this is soldiering!" he was saying to his comrade, as he added handfuls of flour from an open sack. "This is what a man can call campaigning."

"Eh? Ah!" the other grunted. "*Mais pourquoi?*"

"Hear him!" came the astonished answer, while the trooper held a floury hand aloft as if to show his amazement. "He asks why, when the reason is

plain. *Dites donc, mon fou*; is it so often, then, that we fight under the eye and command of an English *garcon*? Poof! That is the charm of the thing. I tell you, yesterday I said to myself: 'Pierre, you will be chopped to pieces before the sun comes up to-morrow. You and your comrades will be but mince meat.'"

The man kneading the dough shivered and grunted his disapproval. "Gently, comrade," he growled. "You will spoil the tart I am making. What then?"

"What then? He asks what then? See here, *mon brave*, we have fighting, heaps of it, and it is the peasants—poor fools!—who are chopped to pieces. We have excitement and work fit for a soldier, I say, and, with it all, see also what we get. Ah! I smell meat cooking, and here is something that we have not seen for many a long day."

He went clanking his spurs across to a corner where the watchful Howeley had deposited a huge jar of jam, and came staggering back with it. The two men took the pan from the low table, lifted the dough from it, and, having thickly dusted the table top with flour, laid their dough upon it. Then came the task of rolling.

"Try that, mate," suggested Howeley, who was now watching the proceedings with a grin of expectation. "Wasn't meant for the job; but beggars can't be choosers."

He offered the barrel of an old firelock, the butt and lock of which had gone, and the trooper took

it with a flourish. Dusting it well, like the table, he rolled the dough with the hand of an expert, and, having satisfied himself that his work was nearly finished, he pinched a corner from the dough and handed it to the rifleman.

"Try," he grunted.

"Real fine!" answered the Cockney. "I'm waiting for this here pie to get finished."

"Then the jam, Pierre."

The second trooper let it fall from the jar into the species of basin which his comrade had now contrived within a shallow pan, and watched as the latter smoothed it down with a wooden ladle. On went the covering of dough, while the cook with skilled eye and hand marked the edges of the pie, dividing it into as many sections as there were defenders.

"Now," he cried, "to the kitchen with it. If we are to be cut to fragments this evening, at noon we will at least dine like gentlemen. Take it, Pierre, and see that you do not get it burned. Then indeed would your punishment be terrible."

Such rejoicing as there was over that meal! Divided into three separate messes, the defenders ate slices of frizzled ham in the recesses of the room above the doorway of the church. Others again washed down the food with liberal allowances of the wine of the country, looking about them through the door opening above the gateway of the yard, while Jack and Mr. Riley held a reception in the corridor from which windows opened into the yard, and there discussed

the good things sent them with many a jest and laugh. Yes, the spirits of the defenders were wonderfully buoyant. And why not?

"Why be miserable while we're alive?" asked Jack, cramming a piece of that wonderful tart into his mouth; for, even if he were wounded, Jack could still show a remarkably undiminished appetite.

"First there's ham, and then there's jam," he sang, till another mouthful kept him silent.

"Indeed, why not be jolly?" chimed in Mr. Riley. "Here we are all tight and weatherproof, as you might say. What's there to grumble at? But, seriously, how on earth is this matter to end? Those peasants have drawn off for the moment; but will they retire from the contest for good? Eh? Now, sir, what's the answer?"

Tom flushed at being addressed in such a manner, and munched steadily at his food. But his deep-set eyes wore a far-away look which showed that he was thinking.

"Eh?" asked Jack, prodding him with the prong of a broken fork discovered in the kitchen. "Do we draw off as victors, receiving well-deserved promotion for this—er—this—shall we say, gallant action? or shall we, in fact——?"

"Be paid the compliment of appearing in the *Gazette* as 'missing'? My word, that would be hard luck after such a business! Now, Tom?"

"More pie," said the latter deliberately. "Whilst we live we'll eat. But who can say what'll happen?

We've given those poor fellows a regular drubbing; but I don't believe they've done with us. I don't like this drawing off, and the silence we now have; it means mischief. I'd give a heap to know what they are up to."

Once the meal was finished, and the horses' wants seen to, the defenders of the place occupied themselves in a hundred different ways. Some cleaned their carbines and burnished their scabbards; others indulged in the luxury of a wash at the pump in the yard; while Tom, on whom the responsibility of everything depended, walked slowly from one end to the other of the defences.

"I'd give a heap to be able to guess rightly what the enemy are up to," he said, for perhaps the tenth time, to Andrews, who seemed to haunt his side. "One sees little or nothing of them."

"Next to nothing, sir," agreed the rifleman, with knitted brows. "But they ain't up to no good, I'm sure of it. You can see 'em come from the village at times and stare over here at us. Then they'll disappear again, while boys and young men scuttle about, and carry armfuls of something that I ain't sure of at this distance. There's been knocking, too, in the church."

"Hum!" Tom pondered over the information. He listened acutely, for he was just at the edge of the platform above the church door. But from that position, indeed from any position held by the defenders, it was impossible to look into the place.

Yes, there was knocking, coming from the interior of the church, and——

"I heard a heavy fall, as if stones had been dislodged!" he exclaimed. "Come down below with me, Andrews."

They ran to the stairs, and scuttled down at their fastest pace. Making their way along the corridor they were soon at the kitchen, and then entered a storeroom beyond. It had been ransacked by Howeley and his helpers, and had provided an ample supply of good things. But it was not the contents of the room that interested Tom; it was the wall, the party wall, on the far side of which was the church.

"Listen," he said. "There!"

A glance at the rifleman's face was sufficient to show that he, too, had gathered the full meaning of those blows.

"Can't get at us by fair means, as you might say, sir," he grunted, "so they're agoing to break through the wall. It'll be a teaser to hold 'em if they once get through."

"Couldn't be done," agreed Tom. "There's not room enough here for more than four men. We should be driven back into the yard, and, of course, an attack would be made in other quarters. It is a teaser!"

His face was drawn and stern as he retraced his footsteps, and stopped to discuss the situation with Mr. Riley.

"Of course we could pile all the bales and boxes

we could find against this side of the wall," he said. "But that would not help us; the peasants would pull them into the church. There's no way of blocking up the passage either, and the difficulty of the situation seems to be this: we have now another place to defend, and no men to spare for the work. I think we shall have to try a sortie."

"Or retire up here and hold on to the last," said the naval lieutenant, his face serious. "But they'd smoke us out, or burn the whole place over our heads. I know well the temper of such men as these. Harmless enough as a general rule, but demons now that they are roused. They've suffered frightfully at the hands of the French, and they have made up their minds to retaliate in the best way they can. Well?"

"I'll see," answered Tom shortly. Turning on his heel, he went off with Andrews, and clattered down the stairs to the yard. Yes, there was nothing for it but to defend the upper story of the house, or——

"Or make for the church again," suggested Andrews, for our hero had spoken his thoughts aloud. "You could clear out those fellows who are working there in a twinkling, carry all the grub and wine in—and there you are, as good as ever you were, and better."

"But with a wall still," said Tom dryly. "They could come in here then, and knock the wall down just the same. We should have them pouring in through the church door and through this other opening. Still, there's a lot in the suggestion. Tell me,

can you see anyone elsewhere than in and around the village?"

They had mounted to the top of the house, and could obtain a clear view. Both stared out in all directions, and kept silent for a few minutes.

"Heaps at the village, sir," reported Andrews after a while. "A few here and there, watching the surroundings. No big body of them anywheres as I can see."

"Nor I; let's get below."

As if bent on a purpose, Tom led the way to the yard, and then dived into the stable. There were the two nags they had seen when first they established themselves in the place, contentedly munching at the hay with which a thoughtful trooper had provided them. Tom pulled a door open and entered the cart shed.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Two of them—light carts too. Call Howeley and his men."

The riflemen came plunging down at once, and stood at attention.

"Get the carts out and the horses harnessed in," Tom ordered. "When that's done, load one of the carts with food. We shan't want water or wine, though you can take a small cask of the latter. Don't overload. Now you, my friend," he went on," addressing one of the troopers, "hurry to the rooms above, and bring down a mattress and some blankets. Quick with it!"

"You're going to—beg pardon, sir," began

Andrews, using his accustomed formula. "You ain't going to take French leave of them beauties! Never!"

His smile told of his delight, and of his agreement with the order.

"Take my compliments to Mr. Riley and your own officer, and help them both to descend," said Tom. "When they are safely in the cart on the mattress I have ordered, and armed, Andrews——"

"Yes, sir."

"And armed with carbines, you get to the top of the building and look about you carefully. If all's clear, let me know. Then slip down to join us. Now, I'll collect the other men."

Very silently and swiftly did the troopers obey his orders. At an earlier date they might very well have demurred and hesitated, delaying, perhaps, to discuss the matter; for why should they give obedience to one who was, nominally at least, their prisoner? But Tom had won their confidence, and that is a great thing where troops are concerned. They merely looked their surprise when ordered to repair to the yard and mount their horses, while the man posted over the church door bared his sabre, as if determined that no fault of his should allow a slinking peasant to mount secretly and discover the movement of the garrison.

"Wait till I call you," whispered Tom. "Then run down to the yard and mount your horse. You understand?"

The fellow grinned at him, a grin of interest and friendship.

"*Parbleu!* An enemy, he!" he grunted, spitting into the palm that gripped his sabre. "By all the fiends, but I, Jacques, would welcome the English as brothers."

The clatter of hoofs told of moving horses, or preparations down below. Not that it was likely to disturb the enemy, for the horses moved often enough, particularly when being watered. Men slipped silently from their defensive posts and crept into the yard, while a couple of brawny troopers bore the injured Jack to the cart, smiling serenely at his angry protestations.

"Treat me as if I were a child," he growled, as Tom came into hearing. "Who said I couldn't walk?"

"I'll leave you behind if you're a trouble," came the answer. "Fiddlesticks, Jack!"

"Or cut his diet down," laughed Mr. Riley, who already lay on the mattress placed on the cart. "That's it, my lad; cut his grub short. That'll make our Jack less fiery. What's up?"

"Going for an airing," came the answer. "Now, men," said our hero, addressing the troopers, who were mounted by now. "You'll fall in on either side of the carts, which will be driven by two selected by yourselves. Spare horses will be led by others. If I have it reported that the coast is clear, we will throw the gates open and ride out. A sharp trot once

we reach the road will take us away from the village. After that——"

"After that, monsieur?" asked one of the men eagerly.

"We will see. You are prisoners at this moment just as much as we are. If we get through, perhaps we'll call it quits. You'll ride for the army of France, and we for our comrades."

That brought a grin of pleasure to the bronzed faces of the men. They would have cheered had not the need for silence been there. Instead, they picked up their reins, and fell in on either side of the carts, waiting for the signal to open the gates. Tom went back to the sentry he had posted over the church doorway.

"All clear," was the report. "There is still knocking."

"Then get to your horse and mount. I am following."

Tom clambered once more into the yard, and looked up at the window which Andrews occupied.

"All clear," came the gentle hail.

"Then fall in—time we were moving."

All were mounted within a minute, save Howeley, who stood at the gates. "Open," called Tom.

"Open it is, sir," said the rifleman, throwing the gates wide at once.

"Forward!"

Steadily, and without sign of undue haste, the cavalcade rode from the yard into the open, leaving

a place which, though it had revictualled them and offered excellent cover, might, were they to hold it longer, lead to disaster. They moved away into the open in regular order, the carts in their midst bearing their wounded and their supplies with them as became good soldiers.

"Trot!" commanded Tom, and at the word the troop set their horses into faster motion, Andrews at their head leading them off obliquely towards a point where the road was accessible.

"Hear 'em!" ejaculated Jack, by no means dismayed, as a torrent of yells and cries came from the village and from a number of points about them. "They don't seem overpleased at our leaving."

CHAPTER X

The Great General

MARCHING from the building which had given them shelter, Tom and his companions struck directly for the road that led away from the hills, Andrews, in advance, standing in his stirrups so as to obtain a better view of his surroundings. Jack watched operations from the mattress placed in the cart, on which he had been placed, a most unwilling prisoner, while the jovial naval lieutenant sat up, his back propped against the side of the cart, and surveyed matters generally from the standpoint of a man who is well satisfied with all that is happening.

"Couldn't be better, couldn't," he observed to the disconsolate Jack; "and hark ye, me lad, for all your grousing I know that you feel the same. Tom's done magnificently; few would have done as well."

It was just what might have been expected of the amiable, if hot-tempered, Jack that he should acquiesce warmly.

"Grandly," he agreed. "Of course one wonders what one would have done oneself under the circumstances, and it's wretchedly unlucky being winged, and having to look on like a child."

"Better than being chopped to pieces at any rate," came the swift answer. "Besides, we're not out of the wood yet. We've to get away from these mountains, and there's still that narrow valley through which we galloped on our way to the place where the real attack was made. I shall be surprised if we get through without meeting with more of the peasants."

There was always that hazard, and as Tom looked about him, riding at the tail of the procession, he was bound to admit that matters still looked gloomy.

"There's no way out of the place but by the road," he said to Howeley, who rode beside him. "Of course we could abandon the horses and take to the hills, but then——"

"Wounded and stores, sir," came the respectful interruption. "Couldn't be done, sir."

"Out of the question, I agree—so on we have to go. To turn the other way would take us back to the village, and then there wouldn't be any reaching the church or other fort as we have done. No, on we have to go. Those peasants are following, and I see scattered groups about us."

The wretched Portuguese who had attacked the troop of horse had indeed taken many precautions to prevent their prey escaping them. Not that the idea had occurred to them that Tom and his men would have the audacity to leave a place that provided a fairly safe haven, and which in any case gave such shelter that more than once attack on the

part of the peasants had failed. But, for fear of one of the troopers venturing to ride away for help, they had posted bands of their comrades round about the church, placing a number on the road, and causing others to march to that narrow part that shut in the wider portion of the valley, and through which fugitives must pass. For half an hour Andrews led the cavalcade forward at a smart pace. He turned on reaching the road, and then pushed along it, the troopers clattering behind him, and riding on either side of the carts. Suddenly his hand went up, bringing the procession to a halt, while Tom galloped up to join him.

"A hundred of the enemy in front, sir," the rifleman reported. "They seem to be blocking the road with a cart, and are stationed behind it."

"While men are racing after us from the village," observed our hero. "Looks ugly, Andrews."

"A hole, sir; but we've been in one as deep and deeper."

"True," agreed Tom; "and we'll climb out of this. Let me have a look at them for a while. We'll move along again at a trot till just out of musket shot. By then I'll have made up my mind how to treat them."

He rode on beside the rifleman, his eyes fixed upon the enemy in front. Shouts came from the latter, while a number could be seen standing behind a cart which had been upset across the narrow road. At this precise point, in fact, the rugged hills on

either side, hills for which Portugal is notorious, converged abruptly, forming as it were a doorway to that end of the valley. The rocky walls ran along within thirty feet of one another for perhaps a hundred yards, and then suddenly broke away again, making the entrance to another valley. Not that one could see the latter, for there was a sharp bend in the cleft between the hills. But Tom remembered the surroundings.

"Ugly place," he told Andrews. "Looks as if the two hills were joined at one time, and then were broken apart. Once through, we have a wide valley to cross, and then another place such as this, but shorter and wider. So if we manage this job we'll do the other. Now for skirmishers."

He swung round on the troop, and with a sign drew all the men toward him. Then selecting eight men, whom he had noticed to be more active than their fellows, he spoke quickly to them, so that they and their comrades could hear.

"Listen, friends," he said. "Behind us the villagers are coming up as fast as their legs can carry them. In front there is this obstruction. Do as I order, and you will see that we shall quickly clear the peasants out. You eight men will divide, and four will go to either side. We are hardly within musket shot yet, so that I shall approach closer. When I signal, hand your reins to your comrades, take your carbines, and make off on to the hill. Clamber up and along till you outflank those fellows

opposite; then shoot them down. We will do the same from the front. Understand?"

"*Oui, monsieur,*" came in a chorus.

"Then on we go."

Tom led them forward at a foot pace, till bullets began to strike the road at his feet, and the distance was so short between the combatants that he could see the enemy easily. He came to a sudden halt and waved his hand. Then, without waiting to watch the troopers told off for special duty, he called to the man driving the store cart to come forward.

"Dismount," he ordered abruptly. "Now turn the cart and horse round. Good! Back the cart steadily towards the enemy. My lads, half a dozen of you will ride after the cart, shooting from behind its shelter. Better still, let three dismount. There will still be enough men left to lead the horses, or you can hitch the reins to the second cart. Yes, that will be better. Let the whole six dismount; then, with the cart to shelter you, you will be able to do something with these people."

A couple of minutes before, a casual glance at the troopers forming the escort to the two carts would have shown doubt on many of the sun-burnt faces; for the difficulty which confronted the fugitives both before and behind was great. That in front seemed almost insuperable, and, seeing it, more than one of the men wondered whether, after all, this was to be the end of their adventure, if here the peasants would

hem them in and slaughter them. But Tom's brisk orders and the novelty of his suggestions set them smiling.

"*Peste!* But this Englishman has brains," grunted one of them, swinging himself swiftly out of his saddle. "These Portuguese peasants are pudding-headed beside him. One moment ago and I thought that the end was near, that I and Strasbourg would see one another no more. Now the path is easier for us—you will see these demons run."

But that had yet to be proved. Massed behind the upturned cart, and already pouring shot at the troopers, the band of peasants hooted and shouted in triumph. They hardly seemed to notice the eight troopers who broke from the ranks of the little procession; for at that moment the store cart was swung round, and the process of slowly backing it towards the enemy began. That operation attracted their whole attention, and soon bullets were thudding against the barrel of wine, tearing a way into the midst of the hams loaded on the cart, or smashing the jars of preserves which the excellent padré's housekeeper had set aside for him. Some went to either side—for the peasants were not first-class shots—while others pelted underneath, passing between the legs of the horse, splashing against the road, and sending little spurts of dust into the eyes of the troopers. The latter made excellent use of the cover. Two were bent double beneath the cart, and already their carbines were cracking sharply. A third lay

on the stores, his head shielded by a wooden box which was filled with sugar, while the remainder walked on either side of the horse, leaning outward and firing whenever an opportunity occurred.

Tom called the remaining troopers about him, and bade them make ready for a charge.

"Once our fellows get on the hill above and outflank them we'll gallop forward," he said. "Ride at the upturned cart. Swing when you get near, and pass in behind. Once we have those rascals moving we'll keep them on the run. So chase them right through to the valley, and there halt till we come up. Ah! Our boys are getting to work. There go their carbines."

The attack was not one that could be made hurriedly, for a horse cannot be backed at a fast pace, and then the ground to be covered by the men sent to outflank the enemy was steep and difficult. Indeed, had the peasants but posted a few of their own men on either hand they could have at once put a stop to such a movement. But it had never crossed their minds that Tom and his men would force this natural gateway. They imagined that they would come to a halt, and that presently, on the arrival of their comrades from the village, the troopers and their English friends would be cut down to a man. That, in fact, was what would have happened had they delayed. But the flanking party scrambled rapidly into position, while the store cart advanced steadily and persistently, the shots from the troopers

sheltering behind it causing havoc amongst the Portuguese. Tom allowed five minutes to elapse, and then, waving a sabre overhead, led Andrews and Howeley and the two or three troopers still remaining against the barricade. Cramming his heels into the flanks of his horse, he sent him down the road at breakneck speed. Swinging past the cart where the troopers were sheltering, he dashed at the obstruction behind which the peasants stood, and, swinging again, burst in on the far side. Andrews and Howeley followed with great dash, while the French troopers were not a yard behind them. And then began a furious struggle. Men slashed desperately at them with scythes, others attempted to unhorse the riders, while a few dived in with the intention of killing the animals. But those swinging sabres beat them off. Already the bullets of the attackers had had some effect, particularly the galling shots of the flanking party. For a moment the issue hung in the balance. Then the men who had fired from behind the cart came up at a run, and instantly the peasants bolted, the three troopers and Howeley galloping after them and keeping them on the run. Perhaps two minutes later the blare of a trumpet was heard in front, and then the clatter of drums. While Tom stared at the retreating peasants, and at the forms of his own men, some twenty or thirty gaily uniformed lancers rode into view, blocking the far end of the pass. The long lances were lifted from their rests as Tom looked. The pennons

fluttered, and then down came the points. A second later an officer rode to the front of these lancers.

"Ah!" gasped Andrews, gaping at them.

"*Ma foi!*" growled one of the Frenchmen at Tom's elbow.

"English—hooray, they're our boys!" came in high-pitched tones from the cart in which Jack and the naval officer were accommodated, and which had been driven up to the scene of the conflict. Upright on the mattress on which he should have been lying stood Jack, wobbling badly, shrieking his delight at the top of his voice. As for Mr. Riley, perspiration covered his forehead and streamed down his face. He held out a hand as they came nearer, signalled to Tom, and gripped his with a feeling there was no misunderstanding.

"Gallantly done, lad!" he cried. "You've pulled us out of the wood. The coming of the lancers has nothing to do with the matter, though it'll help to make things comfortable. Boys, three cheers for Mr. Clifford!"

They gave them with a heartiness there was no denying. French and English joined in the shouts till the rocky walls echoed back the cheers a hundred times. And then all became of a sudden quiet and sober. For those thirty lancers were followed by a hundred perhaps, bringing the fleeing peasants to a sudden halt and causing some of them to attempt the feat of clambering away on either hand. A minute later the ranks of the lancers opened, and

through the open files came a number of horsemen. Tom found himself watching their approach with something akin to fear, for mounted on a magnificent horse which led the procession was a tall officer of high rank without doubt, who rode through the muttering and beaten peasants as if they did not exist. A stern, clean-shaven face was turned in Tom's direction, while the pair of deep-set eyes that flanked a wonderfully hooked nose peered out from beneath a cocked hat at the little band which our hero had led so successfully.

It was Wellington without a doubt, the general who had led our troops so brilliantly in the Peninsula, who had seen fighting in many a place, and had won in far-off India a reputation there was no denying. It was the great Lord Wellington, and with him his chief of the staff, aides-de-camp, and other officers, a glittering throng, gold-braided and medalled, all silently observing Tom and his little party. As for the latter, our hero was almost too astounded even to think, while his followers, conscious of the rank of those who looked at them, and indeed, of the presence of Wellington himself, fell in just behind our hero, shouldered their weapons, and drew themselves up as became good soldiers. Yes, British and French, at war with one another in the Peninsula, but friends in this particular part of it, drew themselves up proudly, as men who had no cause to feel ashamed. Slowly a smile swept across the face of the general.

"I see," he said, so that all could hear. "We have here a little adventure worth hearing. Who is in command of this party?"

Mr. Riley pushed his way to the front, having clambered from the cart with difficulty. Saluting the general, he pointed to Tom.

"That gentleman, sir, is in command," he said steadily.

"And these?" asked the general instantly, indicating the French troopers, with a smile.

"We were their prisoners till a few moments ago. We were taken at sea, landed in this neighbourhood, and taken off by a troop of cavalry. The peasants attacked us suddenly, the officers were shot down, and Mr. Clifford at once took command. I wish to report that he has behaved splendidly. He and the riflemen have been the life and soul of our party. But the troopers behaved most handsomely, and obeyed orders as if they were our men. It is a good story, sir."

"And one we will hear," came the instant answer. "Er, Lieutenant——"

"Riley, sir."

"Ah, Lieutenant, I'm pleased to meet you. We shall camp in this valley, and you will give me the pleasure of dining with me to-night and of bringing your comrades. Mr. Clifford, I think you said."

The naval officer beckoned our hero forward and introduced him formally. Then he took the general to Jack's side, making him known also. As for

Andrews and Howeley, they were beaming in a moment, for Wellington did them the honour of shaking their hands, while smiles broke across the countenances of the French troopers when he halted before them.

"You have an interpreter?" he asked Mr. Riley.

"Mr. Clifford, sir."

"Then repeat what I say, if you please, Mr. Clifford. Tell them I am delighted to hear that they have fought side by side instead of against us, and that they shall be well treated and their conduct reported to their own commanders. Tell them that."

Tom promptly interpreted the words, causing the Frenchmen to flush with pride.

"And now for these wretched peasants," began Wellington, turning to the spot where some fifty of the latter cowered, wondering what was to be done with them. "I presume it is much the same tale as we have had before? Reprisals attempted because of the brutality of the French. Hundreds of these poor fools against a handful of armed men. A sudden attack and a narrow escape. Well, we'll sign to them to be off. There's no interpreter with us just now."

"Pardon, sir," burst in Mr. Riley. "Mr. Clifford speaks the language."

"What? Let me hear him."

Blunt and abrupt in speech, there was something kind nevertheless in the tones of the general, and

at once Tom went to the Portuguese and told them they might depart. When he returned he found Wellington looking at him with strange intensity.

"You are a civilian, sir," he asked, "and speak French and Portuguese?"

"Badly, sir, I'm afraid," smiled our hero. "Also I can get along with Spanish."

"Ah! And make yourself as well understood as in the other two languages?"

"Better, perhaps, sir. My relatives are Spanish."

"And you are a civilian and wish to remain one?"

The eyes looking Tom up and down so closely gleamed. Did they twinkle ever so little? Did this general, whose name was famous throughout many countries, guess at the martial spirit that filled Tom's breast? If he did, no one could do more than guess the fact, for the features never altered. The eyes merely twinkled, and that ever so little.

"A pity," said the general. "You would have made a——"

Flesh and blood could not endure such temptation. Here was the opportunity of his life, and Tom took it with open hands.

"I'm meant for a stool in Oporto, sir," he said. "But I'd give a heap to earn a commission."

"Come to dinner to-night," was the answer he received, while Wellington swung his horse round and rode on through the ranks of the French troopers. But he did not forget our hero, for that very evening, after dinner was over, and the remains of the some-

what frugal meal in which he was wont to indulge had been removed, Wellington called for candles with which to illuminate the headquarters tent, and then bade Mr. Riley tell the story of the adventure. Then he swung round on Tom and eyed him again in a manner that made the young man's heart sink to the depths of his boots. What wonder that the lad who had so bravely led the troopers should tremble under the gaze of Wellington. For this famous general was no ordinary man. The clean-shaven, sharply-cut features showed a determination that was extraordinary and which of itself attracted attention. His short, jerky sentences, however kindly meant, had a way of alarming his juniors, while the severity of his features, his exalted rank, the tremendous responsibilities resting on the shoulders of this man, made him almost awe inspiring. Tom had nothing to be ashamed of. Officers of senior rank out there in the Peninsula, and elsewhere, both before and after this historic conflict, trembled under the gaze of the brilliant tactician. Then why not Tom? But a smile crossing the face of the general reassured him.

"So you were meant for a stool in Oporto and found yourself a prisoner," began the general, putting down the glass from which he had just taken a sip of wine, "and seem to have fallen naturally into the life of a soldier. Let me add, too, you have done wonderfully well. That I can gather even without the tale which Lieutenant Riley has given me.

You have shown discretion and sharpness, sir. The army needs officers with discretion, and, I am proud to say, has them. She needs, too, officers who are linguists. More than all she wants officers able to speak one or more of the languages essential to this campaign, and who have in addition the capacity to command men. Mr. Clifford, my greatest difficulty in this campaign is that of obtaining reliable information. Will you help me?"

Help a general! Help Wellington, the great duke who had defeated the French now on so many occasions! The bare suggestion made Tom flush. But the gallant officer addressing him was serious enough.

"Come," he said. "I want an officer for special service. He shall be posted to my staff, and his special work will be to gather an escort of the natives of Portugal or of Spain about him. He will seek for information as to the movements of the enemy. He will make sudden raids where necessary, and if occasion suggests it he shall even enter the camps of the French and gather full tidings. It is a dangerous task. It may mean wounds or death. The danger of imprisonment is very great. Also, if the duties be carried out with discretion and boldness, it means honour and promotion. Mr. Clifford, I am happy to offer you a commission as an ensign, unattached at present, to date from the day when you were taken by the French. My next dispatch home shall make mention of your name and of my wishes. To-morrow evening general orders shall confirm this

offer, while the following evening shall see you promoted to lieutenant for this recent action. Afterwards you will carry out the instructions which shall be handed to you. Will you accept?"

Would he accept! Would Tom take the very thing for which he had longed, and become one of the king's officers! He jumped at the offer. His delight robbed him of the power of speech, so that he could only mumble his thanks. He retired, in fact, from the presence of the famous general with his head and brain in a whirl.

"Hearty congratulations," cried Lieutenant Riley, smacking him on the back as soon as they reached their own quarters. "We'll tell Jack now. Pity the pain in his leg sent him away from the general's before this happened. Ha! we've news, Jack."

The ensign had retired early from the dinner, the excitement and movement of the last two days having set up inflammation in his wound, though in the case of the naval officer it seemed to have actually done his injury good. Jack lay on a camp bed provided by the surgeon, blinking in the light of a candle.

"Eh?" he asked, glancing sleepily at them.

"Look out for squalls, my boy."

"Why? Don't understand, sir."

"You soon will," laughed Mr. Riley. "Tom's an awful martinet, and he's your senior."

It was all true enough, though our hero found difficulty in understanding the matter. For the very next evening found an announcement in General Orders.

There was a short, flattering reference to Lieutenant Riley and Jack. And then the following words: "The commander-in-chief has pleasure in recommending that Mr. Clifford be granted a commission in His Majesty's forces, for his action when in temporary command of the French troopers attacked by Portuguese peasants. Ensign Clifford is posted to the headquarters staff."

The following evening found a second announcement. "Ensign Clifford, headquarters staff, is recommended for promotion for gallantry in a recent action."

"My uncle!" exclaimed Jack, when he read the orders, "you'll be a full-blown general, Tom, before I'm a captain. Don't forget me, that's all. I'd look awfully fine in the uniform of a staff officer."

"A general? Why not?" Tom asked himself as he rolled himself in a blanket. "I'm young, young for the rank of lieutenant. I'm in the midst of a glorious campaign. And owing to the fact that I can speak Portuguese, French, and Spanish I'm to be engaged on special service. Why not a general one of these days?"

He forgot to look on the other side. Forgot, with the usual impetuosity and carelessness of youth, to reckon the risks to be run in achieving such honours. But then Tom did not realize what was before him. To begin with, he reckoned without José de Esteros, his most unloving cousin, whom he imagined still in England.

CHAPTER XI

On Active Service

A CRISP, cool breeze straight from the sea swept through the streets of Oporto and fanned the brows of three horsemen who were riding in from the country about ten in the morning some six weeks after the events already narrated. A brilliant autumn sun shed its rays far and wide, causing white walls and pavements to flash back shafts of light which were almost blinding in their intensity, while the russet hues of the foliage looked wonderfully bright and enchanting.

"Oporto at last!" exclaimed one of the three horsemen, a youth dressed in the uniform of a staff officer. "At last!"

"And none too soon," came from his companion, riding at his knee. "None too soon, Tom, my boy. Army rations are good enough when there's nothing else to be had, but give me the sight of a town now and again. There'll be dinners to be had, there'll be invitations galore to the houses of the big people, dances, fêtes, everything you can wish for or imagine."

Jack laughed uproariously, the happy laugh of a youth who is bent on pleasure, and who is ready to enjoy all that comes his way. For this was Jack

Barwood, Ensign, of the 60th Rifles, attached for special service to Lieutenant Tom Clifford's command. And the youth who looked so well in the uniform of a staff officer was none other than our hero. Respectfully in rear of them, precisely three horses' length behind, rode the rifleman Andrews, as erect as any cavalry soldier trained, his eyes glistening at the prospect of a rest in Oporto, a bed to sleep in, and all the entertainment a city promised.

"And work," interjected Tom, when Jack had finished speaking. "All play and no work makes Jack a bad soldier. Eh?"

Jack made reply by snatching at his sword and half-drawing it, while he glared at his comrade. However it was all fun, and only a symptom of good spirits. Jack was now in clover; but for that chance meeting with our hero and the adventure which had followed he would have been along with his regiment, then scattered by companies, and his lot would have been very different. Instead he was appointed for special service, than which there is nothing more eagerly sought by an officer. He was Tom's right-hand man, his adviser if you like—though Lieutenant Riley smiled satirically when that was suggested — his adjutant when engaged with irregulars.

Jack had, in fact, in spite of his want of seriousness, been of great service to our hero. For, with the help of Andrews, he had instructed him in the customary duties of an officer and had taught him more than a smattering of drill.

"Just enough to let you manœuvre the irregulars you are to command," he had assured Tom, with a laugh. "You can't expect always to carry out an adventure like that we passed through with nothing but cheek to help you. Knowledge is wanted, my boy! I'll be the one to give it to you."

One could hardly have imagined a worse instructor; but when it came to the point Jack had proved an excellent fellow, and very soon, thanks to his tuition, Tom found himself able to drill a company with ease, and to understand how a battalion could be manœuvred. It took but a short while for him to grip other points particular to an army: how it was split up into divisions, consisting of so many brigades in each case, and how those brigades were made up of battalions, each, of course, boasting of a certain number of companies. As for a command, Tom had not been long in finding one.

"You will endeavour to enlist Portuguese and Spanish irregulars." the chief of Wellington's staff had told him. "We leave it to you to suggest a plan; but, of course, your main work will be to seek out information concerning the enemy."

"I'm wondering——" began Tom that very evening, when he and Jack lay beneath the same tent.

"Eh? Don't!" came the facetious and grinning answer. "Don't, my boy; your brain'll not stand it."

"Seriously, though," Tom went on, ignoring his friend's good-natured raillery.

"Of course; you're always serious. Well, you're

wondering; and I'm wondering why you're wondering instead of getting off to sleep. It's a beast of a night, raining cats and dogs, and a chap needs to sleep to escape the blues."

"It would do you good to be out with our pickets then," cried Tom warmly, irritated by his friend. "I've a good mind to send you off with a message to——"

That brought Jack sitting upright with a jerk. After all, Tom was his senior, ridiculous though it did appear, and if he carried out such a threat, why, Jack must perforce obey, though such a thing as an order had never yet come from his friend.

"You were wondering — yes," he jerked out hurriedly.

"Whether I should ride back to that village where we had that fight with the peasants. I'm ordered to enlist irregulars. I propose having a band here in Portugal and one in Spain, close to the border. We all know that the two peoples don't agree very well. There are continual jealousies between them; but they would work together on occasions. I propose going to that village to enlist the Portuguese part of my command."

The suggestion took Jack's breath away and filled him with horror.

"What! They'd tear you to pieces," he exclaimed. "It's madness. It's——"

"I shall ride there to-morrow," said Tom, cutting him short. "You can stay behind if you're nervous."

And off they went, with Andrews their only escort. Riding into the village over the heaped-up mound which marked the spot where the peasants had dug a trench to arrest the French troopers, Tom and Jack were greeted most respectfully. None recognized in the handsome staff officer the leader of the troopers, nor in his smart brother officer the young fellow who was with him, and who had barely even now recovered from the wound inflicted. Tom rode direct to the house of the mayor, and dropped from his saddle. And then had followed an exciting incident. When he spoke, the people recognized him. Men rushed to the spot howling threats. Weapons appeared as if by magic, and for a while it looked as if, in spite of their being English, the little party would be cut to pieces. But here again Tom showed his mettle; not once did he betray concern.

"I make no excuses," he said sternly. "What we did was forced on us; but I have come back to bury old scores and to offer a favour to you."

His unconcern alone won him friends at once, while the memory of how he had treated those men who had descended to the courtyard and had been hemmed in there told in his favour. Where a minute earlier men had shrieked at him, they now smiled and lifted their caps—more than that, many were eager to do service. Thus it came about that within three days Tom had as many hundred *Cacadores*, or Portuguese irregulars, drilling close to the British army, on ground specially allotted to them, while within six

weeks he had set off for Oporto for the special purpose of arranging for a similar party of Spaniards.

"It's work that you can look forward to, Jack," he repeated, as they came to the outskirts of Oporto. "I haven't ridden in here for the sole purpose of eating big dinners and dancing with all the fairest girls in Oporto. I'm here on business, your business, the British army's business, and don't you forget it!"

Jack screwed his face up as if he were disgusted.

"But," he began, "there'll——"

"Be time for fun—perhaps," agreed Tom. "But business first. I shall ride direct for the house of Juan de Esteros and Septimus John Clifford & Son."

"Of Oporto."

"And of London—wine merchants. Don Juan's my uncle; I'm looking forward to the meeting. Wonder if he'll have news of the folks at home?"

Men stepped aside to look at the two young officers, lifting their caps; city people raised a cheer more than once as they recognized the uniform of a staff officer; while often enough a handkerchief fluttered from some window as Tom and Jack walked their horses through the city. There was abundant evidence, in fact, of the popularity of the British; and had our heroes cared for entertainment, and possessed the time, they could have spent a year passing from one hospitable house to another. Everyone was glad to see them. Everyone!—no. There was one

exception, though he passed unnoticed amongst the crowds. A face peeped out from the window of a hovel that was squeezed in at the corner of a square which Tom and Jack were just entering, while the limbs of the owner of that face writhed and twisted incessantly. A thin, weak hand played with the corner of a weak mouth, while a scowl of hatred lined a narrow forehead. The young man—for he was but little older than Tom—stretched out a little farther, so as to obtain a better view of the officers riding before him, and then ducked back out of sight.

"Tom Clifford!" he hissed. "He in Oporto! Safe from the sea, and an officer! Ah!"

The scowl deepened, for the moment was a bitter one for José. Yes, it was José de Esteros, whom we saw last in London, the scheming vindictive nephew to whom John Clifford had given a home for many a year, and who had rewarded his uncle after such a manner. It was the sneaking youth who had procured Tom's impressment, and who had schemed and schemed so that, one of these days, he might become the head of the firm of Septimus John Clifford & Son. It was, in fact, the ruffian who hoped to break through that old tradition of the firm owned by his uncle, and deprive it of the son who, following unbroken custom, should succeed.

"Tom Clifford!" he gasped again. "An officer too! How? And in Oporto! Why?"

A guilty conscience supplied the answer promptly. It was for his arrest that Tom had come without a

doubt, and here again was added injury. Let us realize the position of affairs exactly. Far from being sorry for the rascally action he had undertaken, José vented the whole of his own displeasure on Tom's unconscious head. He had always been jealous of our hero. He hated him now because of the failure of the wicked scheme which should have ruined him, and hated him still more because retribution and discovery had come so soon. Indeed, Tom had scarcely reached the ship after his impressment when Huggins, John Clifford's faithful clerk, had unravelled the conspiracy, and had compelled the ruffian who had captured him to admit the fact. And José had had a near escape of being sent to prison; for with the unravelling of the conspiracy came the knowledge that he had robbed his uncle. But this wretched youth was as crafty as he was sneaking. Swift to detect discovery, he had once more robbed his uncle and had departed. A ship sailing that very evening for Oporto took him aboard, and within a week José de Esteros had presented himself at his uncle's, at Don Juan de Estero's house, where the Portuguese branch of the famous firm of Septimus John Clifford & Son was established. And there he had remained for two months, giving it out that his cousin had run away from home, and that he, José, had been sent to take his place. Cleverly intercepting the frantic letters which John Clifford wrote, José kept up the deception till, one fine morning, the faithful Huggins landed and appeared at the office. Then

José ran again and hid himself in the hovels of the city. It was in one of these that he was located on the morning of Tom's entry, engaged, one may be sure, in further rascally schemes which the unexpected arrival of his cousin at once gave zest to.

"Tom Clifford here!" he again ejaculated, crouching behind the window. "Then here's a chance to go on with the matter. Because I failed once, it won't be for always; I've a splendid game before me."

The shaking fingers went to his thin lips again, while his limbs writhed and seemed to knot themselves together.

"I'll kill him!" José hissed, as Tom began to pass out of his vision. "Yes, and I'll make use of the information which Don Juan gave me. Ha, ha! It makes me smile. He took me into his confidence. Told me of his riches, of the wealth his son would have. He's my cousin too, like Tom. Why shouldn't I have their share from both sides of the family?"

The pale features of this half-Spaniard wrinkled into a smile that was more sardonic than anything. The thin, writhing fingers played about the corners of his mouth, while the pair of bright and somewhat protruding eyes which a second before had been fixed upon the stalwart form of Andrews, then the only one of the three horsemen remaining visible, lost themselves in a vacant gaze. In those few following seconds José saw himself powerful and rich, head of a prosperous old firm, a partner of the business in

the place of his cousin Tom, successor to his Uncle Juan's riches.

Let us turn from the contemplation of a youth so devoid of all that was pleasant and taking—José was born with a kink, a moral kink, if you will—let us leave him with it and follow Tom and his comrade. But in doing so let us remember that though José might be weak, he was yet a force to be reckoned with, a force, had Tom but known it, likely enough to come between him and those much-cherished ambitions. José might easily intervene between the gallant and handsome staff officer whom he called cousin and that post in the army to which youthful good spirits and assurance caused him to aspire.

"The way to the house of Septimus John Clifford & Son, *señor*," answered a man of whom Tom made an enquiry. "There are few in this city who do not know the name and the house. Pass directly on till you enter another square, then turn to the left, descending toward the water. The house is on the right, some little distance down."

There it was at last. Jack pulled in his horse at the sight, while his estimation of our hero went up a little. For to the high and mighty Jack trade was trade, something at which he was rather wont to turn up his nose. It was purely ignorance of the world that made him do so; for to do him but justice the young ensign was no snob. And here he found himself in front of an enormous range of buildings, with warehouses and stores running right down to the

water. Over the main building flew the flag of England, with that of Portugal close beside it, while a board of modest proportions announced the fact that this was the home of Septimus John Clifford & Son.

Tom slid from his saddle, handed his reins over to Andrews, and went striding up the steps of the building, his sword and sabretache swaying at his side. A very gallant figure he cut too as he entered the office and enquired for Don Juan de Esteros.

"What name?" he was asked.

"Say a British officer," he responded, and presently was ushered into a handsomely furnished office. A little man, bearing traces of obvious ill health, rose from a chair, and at once advanced with hand cordially outstretched.

"This is an honour," he said in broken English, mingled with a word of Portuguese. "To what do I owe the visit? What can I do for you, sir? But surely——"

As he gripped Tom's hand he peered through his spectacles into his face, while a flush suddenly suffused his own olive complexion.

"I am your nephew," said our hero abruptly, speaking Spanish and smiling at his uncle. "Very much at your service."

A shout escaped Don Juan. He went to a door leading from the back of the room and called loudly. A minute later a familiar figure burst into the room and rushed at Tom. It was Septimus John Clifford himself, fatter than ever perhaps, rosy-faced, but

active. The meeting between father and son can be imagined. They gripped hands and stood staring at one another for perhaps five seconds.

"Well!" at last John gasped, standing away from his son. "A handsome figure you cut, Tom. A soldier, eh?"

"On General Lord Wellington's staff, sir."

"And mighty well you'll do, sir," came the answer. "Mighty proud I am of you. I've heard the tale. It's barely thirty hours since I set foot in Portugal, and who should I meet but Lieutenant Riley, who was just about to embark for England. We dined together. He talked, sir. Yes, he made me feel proud. Tom, the business can still be carried on with one of its partners in the army. I'm proud of you, lad."

Septimus John Clifford had a long tale to tell his son, and it was half an hour later before our hero recollected that he had left Jack waiting outside. By then he had learned all that had happened during his absence from England. How José's cruel conspiracy had been discovered. How in course of time a report had come through the Admiralty telling of Tom's impressment, of the action at sea, and of his behaviour. And then had followed silence. The ship on which he should have reached Oporto failed to put in an appearance. Reference to the French failed to discover news, and John Clifford was reduced again to the depths of despair, imagining that Tom had gone to the bottom of the sea with his comrades.

"Then there was the case of José, your cousin," he said severely. "He acted like a hound all through, and but for Huggins would have done us further injury. Imagine the duplicity and cunning of the rascal. He presented himself to your uncle here as your successor. He wormed himself artfully into his regard, intercepted all our letters, and finally bolted, having once more stolen all that he could lay his hands on. The news of his vileness brought me out here, and contrary winds delayed me till the night before last. Then, and only then, did I hear of you, my boy, and of all that you have been doing."

He stood away from our hero again and inspected him with obvious pride, while Don Juan peered through his spectacles at the young staff officer whom he called nephew.

"A fine soldier, John," he ventured. "A good leader, by all accounts."

"And come here to let us see him. What brought you, sir?" asked John.

"Business," said Tom crisply. "But let me call in my friend and adjutant. We have business with Don Juan."

The meeting with Jack was most cordial, and presently all four were seated in the office.

"Now," said Don Juan.

"We came to ask for your help," began Tom.

"If it's money you want, lad, as is only natural, why you shall have plenty," burst in John.

"It's men," answered our hero. "I want to raise

a small force of Spaniards, and I want also a leader to act under my orders, on whom I can at once rely."

It was wonderful with what enthusiasm the two older gentlemen received this information. Don Juan pulled off his glasses and then pushed them back again on to his nose. He got up from his seat and paced backwards and forwards, and later suddenly faced the two officers.

"You want a command composed of Spaniards; I can lay my hand on such a force," he said. "Alfonso, my son, is now in Spain, within easy distance of Madrid, and, were I to command him, could raise a force there. But the men of the towns are not to be relied on. For guerrillas you could have none better than the mountaineers living on the frontier between Spain and Portugal."

"Just so," agreed Tom promptly. "Hardier and braver, sir."

"Precisely," came the answer; "and with this, added to their natural feelings of patriotism, they will be led by the son of the man on whose estate they work, and will have in supreme command that son's cousin, a British officer on the staff of no less a person than General Lord Wellington himself."

The little man skipped about the room in his enthusiasm, and forgot for the moment the decorum usually expected of a sedate business man. He snapped his fingers in his glee, and winked and blinked at Tom and at the company generally through his glasses.

"Alfonso shall call them up and command them," he cried; "Tom Clifford, of the firm of Septimus John Clifford & Son, shall be in supreme command. How's that for an arrangement? No trouble about pay either, Tom. I'll see to that; I've abundance with which to pay every one of the following."

The suggestion almost took Septimus Clifford's breath away. The stout little head of the old and extremely respectable business firm looked across at the jubilant little man, who for many a year had conducted the affairs of the firm in Portugal and Spain, as if he considered him mad. He gasped for breath, polished his bald head with a huge silk handkerchief of brilliant red colour, and blew heavily, puffing out his cheeks.

"What!" he exclaimed, pointing a fat finger at Don Juan. "You will place a force at Tom's disposal. You will call up the men on your estate, and will put your only son in command."

"Why not, sir?" Don Juan flashed out the question, and then smiled at his partner. "Why not? A pretty person you are, to be sure! You ask in one breath whether I will do this thing, knowing that my country is overrun by France, yet in the previous breath you sing praises because your only son, the son who should represent the firm, is on Lord Wellington's staff. Moreover, you gloated horribly over the details of the fighting in which he took a prominent part, and which were given you by that naval officer."

A condemnatory finger was pointed at Septimus John Clifford. Don Juan regarded him severely for some moments, and then smiled and snapped his fingers.

"Come," he said; "the affairs of our business lose significance when compared with the dangers of this country and the efforts of your soldiers. Tom asks for Spanish irregulars; he shall have them. He asks for a commander; Alfonso is the lad. Eh? You don't dare deny it."

Septimus did not. In his heart he was delighted, and, like the sensible, long-headed man he was, he promptly sat down to discuss ways and means. As for Tom and Jack, they spent three days in the city, and then, accompanied by a guide, set off for the Spanish frontier.

"You will be met there by Alfonso," said Don Juan. "I have sent a man across to him, and he will be at the estate as soon as you are. Here is a letter for him, and you will find that he will give you every assistance, and will fall into this scheme with eagerness."

Some three days later found our two heroes at the estate belonging to Don Juan, where they were joined a day later by Alfonso. He rode up on a big mule, and dropped from his saddle at the porch of the house. A fine, frank young fellow he proved to be.

"Glad to meet you, señors," he cried. "Which is my cousin?"

"You speak English?" asked Tom, when the greetings were over.

"Not a word; but Portuguese, of course."

"Then Jack must hurry up with his lessons," grinned Tom; for his adjutant, with that perverseness common to many English lads, hated languages. Too full, perhaps, of insular pride, he imagined that his own tongue should carry him everywhere, and that foreigners should promptly contrive to add English to theirs, rather than that he should be bothered to master any language beyond his own. A perverseness, one may call it, a perverseness that gives the foreigner an enormous opportunity, and in these days of easy transit and of broadened interests, is telling against the Englishman. The polyglot Britisher of to-morrow will advance better and farther than will the man of to-day who is ignorant of all other languages than his own. However, Jack was not the one to be stupid, and, indeed, for quite a while had been struggling with French, Portuguese, and Spanish.

The four weeks which followed were busy ones for the three young fellows. First the men of the estate had to be called up, together with others living in the neighbourhood.

"We want three hundred, so as to match those in Portugal," said Tom. "It will be as well also to have a reserve, who can go on training in our absence. I shall do the same with the men we have raised in Portugal, and, as it seems that the two forces are at this moment separated by only some fifty miles, there will be no need to move nearer. But we must enlist

the help of men living between us. It will not be difficult to devise signals, such as fires on the hill-tops, which will warn either party or will summon one to join the other."

The end of the month found Alfonso's particular command sufficiently trained for active work. No large amount of drill was given them; but they were able to perform simple movements, and, at Jack's suggestion, worked at the call of a whistle. One long call would see their bivouacs broken, their knapsacks swung over their shoulders, and each man in his place in the ranks, his musket at his shoulder. Consisting of three hundred men, they were divided into companies a hundred strong, for each of which a reliable leader was found. Moreover, Tom had no fault to find with the formation when those companies were drawn up for inspection.

"Smartness on parade is all very well, and good for discipline," he said, whereat Jack grinned his approval, "but it won't win engagements, and the engagements we are likely to be in don't require rigid lines. Try 'em with two long whistles."

Alfonso had barely given the signals when the companies broke up as if by magic and re-formed at once into small squares, with some fifty paces between them.

"For cavalry," said Jack, approval in his voice. "If they've courage, and will stand fast, cavalry will have little terror for them. If they break——"

"Every man would be cut to pieces, *señor*," said Alfonso. "That is a thing they know. I trust soon

that we may have an opportunity of testing their courage."

It happened that such an opportunity came almost instantly, on the very morning when Tom and Jack were to return to Portugal. A couple of French squadrons burst suddenly upon the little command when engaged at drill, and galloped down upon them. For one moment there was confusion in the ranks; then Tom's cheery voice was heard, while Alfonso sounded his whistle.

"Get to the farthest square," Tom shouted at Jack. "I'll take the centre with Andrews, while Alfonso goes to the third. Our presence will hearten the men."

Clapping spurs to their horses' flanks they galloped to their posts, and, dismounting within each square, turned to face the enemy.

"Hold your fire till I shout," commanded Tom. "Let those who are kneeling reserve their fire till the men standing above them have opened upon the enemy. Have no fear, boys—double that strength of the enemy could not harm you."

But in spite of his assurance he had some qualms. Other guerrilla forces composed of Spaniards had thought to do well, and had faced French cavalry; but they had broken at the critical moment, and had been sabred to a man. Would these fine fellows follow suit, or would they stand firm? Ah! A man at one of the corners rose from his knees and looked wildly at the enemy. He dropped his musket as if

it had stung him, and then, doubling up as if he were a hare, set off from the face of the square.

"Halt!" Tom bellowed. "You will be shot if you do not stop. Let the three men at the corner aim at him and fire if he does not return instantly."

There came a growl from many of the men. Two or three looked as if they might follow the bad example set them. Then there was a sharp report, followed by the fall of the coward who had bolted from the square, and who had been deaf to Tom's orders.

"Form up there in the corner," he commanded, severely. "You see what happens to a man who deserts his comrades. Let it be a lesson to all. Make ready to fire; stand firm. We shall beat them."

Let those who have not tested the experience imagine what nerve it must require to stand shoulder to shoulder in the open and see a horde of horse and men galloping down upon you. The animals take on a stature wonderfully enlarged—they seem even more ferocious than their riders—sabres whirl and appear to stretch far in advance, so as to reach easily an enemy. The situation brings for the instant a feeling of helplessness, one calculated to disturb the courage of the boldest. Would Tom's little command and the men massed in the other squares be proof against such an ordeal?

"Charge!" The loud command from the leader of the French squadrons sent a flood of men and horse madly down upon them.

CHAPTER XII

Guarding the By-ways

GROUPED together in three separate squares, Tom's Spanish command awaited the onset of the French horse, each man gripping the musket supplied to him by his British allies, and, in the case of those in our hero's own particular square, awaiting his orders before discharging the weapon. Nor had the lesson of the shooting of the man who had fled from the ranks been lost on his comrades. There may have been others inclined to show cowardice; but such a salutary example checked them.

"Kneeling rank make ready!" shouted Tom, when the eyes of the oncoming troopers were visible. "Fire!"

A storm of bullets sped from the square, while the company nearest opened on the enemy at the same moment.

"Reload!" bellowed Tom, peering through the smoke. "Now those who are standing take aim. Fire!"

The volleys rang out in rather quick succession, and were followed at once by the ring of ramrods. And all the while there came to the ear the thunder

of horses' hoofs and the shouts of excited men. Tom saw through the billowing smoke a number of dark figures which flashed past the square as if borne on a gale. A few of these same figures seemed to struggle against the current that bore them, and then, as the smoke blew aside, and one could see better, they appeared as individual troopers or officers who had reined back their horses. Then with loud and angry shouts they dug spurs deep into the flanks of the gallant beasts they rode, and, swinging their sabres, dashed madly at the nearest face of the square.

"Ready!" shouted Tom. "Fire individually. Keep them at a distance."

Once more there was a sharp fusillade; while, to the consternation of more than one of the men, bullets from the adjacent square, aimed no doubt at the enemy, swept overhead, narrowly missing friends. As for the French, foiled in this their first attempt, they drew off and re-formed at a distance. Tom at once climbed into his saddle and rode out to Alfonso's square.

"Bravely done, men!" he called out, reining in close at hand. "I see you did some execution; but you must be careful next time with your bullets. You sent a number just over our heads. Now, Alfonso, draw off your men by squares till we reach that broken ground. If we march as we are you will lead the way; Jack will come next, and my little lot will act as rearguard."

He rode across to Jack's company and congratulated them also. Then he rejoined his own men, while Alfonso set the whole command in motion. Taking care to keep the distances between the companies, the whole force marched away from the French, till a shout and a shrill whistle from the young Spaniard commanding the force caused all to halt. Looking over his shoulder, Tom saw that the Frenchmen were advancing again, and at once drew his own men compactly together.

"Remember that you are acting as the rearguard, and bear yourselves accordingly. Obey my orders and you will come out of the conflict victoriously. Let each man wait till he gets the word to fire."

It was as well, perhaps, that the men had had some previous experience of fighting; and though this was actually the first day on which they had come in conflict with the enemy, the recent charge of the French, and the manner in which they had been driven away, had heartened them wonderfully. Even so, this second occasion proved a greater ordeal for Tom's own particular company; for the French seemed to have decided to hurl all their weight on one square, with the object of defeating the three companies in detail. Drawing in their ranks now, they set their horses at Tom's square with an impetuous dash that elsewhere had sent Spaniards fleeing. Once more Tom saw the commander stand in his stirrups, fling his sabre overhead, and yell the command to charge. Then the

mass came forward at speed, looking as if they would ride over the square and stamp every living man there out of existence. Crisp and cool came Tom's orders.

"Kneelers, fire!" he bellowed. "Now, those standing—reload!"

Very rapidly he had altered to a slight degree the formation of the square, throwing the corner at which the French attack was aimed farther outward, making the angle, in fact, much sharper, and so enabling more men on either face to take effective aim. The flash of the muskets was answered at once by shrieks and shouts, and by the neighing of horses. Men fell from their saddles, maddened beasts crashed to the ground, rolled over, and lay frantically plunging. Then the bulk of the enemy, hit hard by the second volley, swept past the square like a torrent, and galloped away to a distance. Tom at once stepped outside the square, and, with the help of a couple of the men, liberated a trooper who was pinned beneath his horse.

"There, *mon brave*," he said, with a smile, "go to your commander and tell him not to make the attempt again; these Spaniards are well able to look after themselves."

To his amazement the man clutched him by the hand and then grinned widely. Looking closely into his face, beneath its thatch of ruffled hair, Tom recognized one of the troopers who had helped to defend the church, and promptly shook his hand eagerly.

"*Ma foi!* and so soon," gasped the fellow. "See, monsieur, a little while ago, two months perhaps, you and I and the others do our best to cut the throats of a common enemy. Now we would cut one another's. Truly war is a farce, and here am I your prisoner, whereas you were mine but a while ago."

The absurdity of the change tickled the man, and, though shaken by his fall, he laughed uproariously. Then, aided by Tom again, he clambered into the saddle borne by another horse resting beside its slain master, and rode away, thanking Tom profusely. Nor was that the last seen of him, for almost before Alfonso had put the three companies in motion again half a dozen Frenchmen were seen to be spurring towards them. One detached himself then from the number, and presently was seen to be the officer. Fearless, as were these French cavalrymen, he rode right up to the squares, lifting his hat as he came.

"Monsieur," he began, addressing Alfonso, while the Spaniards in the ranks gazed at him open-mouthed, "have I the honour of addressing Monsieur Tom Clifford?"

Alfonso at once pointed to our hero, for he understood the language. Then once more, when the officer had arrived at the last of the squares, he repeated his question.

"At your service, Capitaine," replied Tom.

"The Monsieur Tom Clifford who defended the

church against those *canaille* of Portuguese, and commanded French troopers?"

Tom bowed. "The same," he said. "Glad if I was of service."

"Then permit me to apologize for this attack," came the answer, while the French officer swept his hat from his head again and bent over the pommel of his saddle. "The tale of that fighting of monsieur, and of the command he took, has gone through the French army. Napoleon himself, the Emperor, has heard and commended. Monsieur, we fight with the British, and with these *canaille* of Portuguese and Spanish; but we do not fight with monsieur. I have the honour to observe that, though I have strong reinforcements at hand, I shall retire, trusting that you will do so also. To fight with such a friend is not *comme il faut.*"

Off went the hat again. The officer saluted, while Tom returned the compliment. And then the officer was gone. They watched him ride away with his command, and saw some five hundred other troopers join him. They never renewed the attack, but, clapping spurs to their horses, rode away out of sight, magnanimously declining to fight against our hero.

"And a jolly lucky thing for all of us!" declared Jack, when the men were back in their bivouacs, and had broken their ranks. "Our fellows did grandly, and are wonderfully heartened at their success; but they realize, just as we realize, that an attack by the whole force of cavalry would have overwhelmed us.

Wonder how our Portuguese fellows would have behaved under similar circumstances. Wish we had had them here and put them to the test."

But Jack need have had no fears that the command generally would not soon be engaged, for that very evening brought a galloper in from headquarters. Tom tore open the official envelope, and read the contents with gusto.

"To Lieutenant T. Clifford", it went. "You will report at once at headquarters, and will take steps to concentrate your command on the frontier. This message is urgent."

"Then off we go!" Tom cried eagerly. "Alfonso, you will march your men to the frontier to-night, and will bivouac wherever suitable. March at dawn again, till you have covered some thirty miles in all, then halt and wait for our signals. Jack and I will be off at once."

That was the best of youth and energy. It carried the two young fellows away at once, with Andrews in attendance. Nor did they halt till darkness compelled them to do so. Rapping at the door of an isolated farm, they were welcomed at once, leaving after a refreshing sleep at the first streak of dawn. The following evening found them at headquarters, where Tom at once reported himself.

"Ah, you have come quickly!" was his greeting from the chief of staff. "Now, Mr. Clifford, I will see if his lordship can receive you."

In the course of a few moments our hero found

himself once more in the presence of the great general, who greeted him with a smile.

"Been defending any more churches, or commanding other Frenchmen?" he asked, with a quizzing smile that became downright laughter when he saw how Tom was blushing. "Now, confess."

Tom had already reported the raising of the Spanish force, and lamely admitted that they had been engaged with the enemy. "We beat them off twice, sir," he said. "Then they received reinforcements, and matters would have been ugly."

"Ah, would have been!" smiled the general. "How did they clear up, then? You had an agreement with the enemy?"

"I met a friend," admitted our hero, with rising colour; "one of the troopers who helped to defend the church. Then the officer came forward and told us to move off, and declined to fight further."

"And a gallant fellow he was, too!" laughed Wellington. "However, you cannot always hope for such fortune, though I congratulate you on the behaviour of your Spaniards. How I wish all would act likewise, instead of being for the most part wholly unreliable! But now for a mission—it means danger."

Tom drew himself up and saluted. "Quite so, sir," he said cheerfully.

"It is a species of forlorn hope; discovery means death."

"What are the orders, sir?" asked Tom respectfully, never flinching.

"And success means much to me. I want reliable information as to the defences of Ciudad Rodrigo. I rely absolutely on the discretion of the officer I employ, for my intention of attacking that place must never be guessed at. I want that information, and I want to learn how it is that certain of our secrets have reached the enemy. There, Mr. Clifford; I give no orders; volunteers alone undertake the forlorn hope."

"Then I volunteer now, sir," exclaimed Tom promptly. "Am I to make what use I like of my men?"

"You are to dispose them so as to prevent anyone entering or leaving Ciudad Rodrigo without observation," came the sharp answer. "Good evening, Mr. Clifford!"

Our hero saluted with precision, turned about with the smartness that became a soldier, and hurried away.

"Well?" asked Jack, all eagerness.

"Let the men make ready for an early start. Draw rations and ammunition for a couple of weeks; I'll be back in an hour."

Tom swung himself into his saddle and rode away to the outskirts of the cantonments; for the troops were now in winter quarters, and already the weather had been severe.

"Now, how's it to be done?" he asked himself. "I've to get into Ciudad Rodrigo, which I know swarms with French soldiers, and I am to intercept

messages that appear to be going to the enemy. How's it all to be done?"

Walking his horse well away from the vicinity of the troops, he thought the matter out, and returned to his own command just as darkness was falling.

"Let the men eat," he said abruptly. "We will march when darkness has fallen, and so attract no attention. There may be people about watching our troops."

It was two hours later when the men fell in at Jack's whistle. They marched from the cantonments in absolute silence, each man bearing rations and ammunition on his shoulders, while still more was carried in a couple of carts. Taking a track that led to the mountains, and being guided by one of the men who knew the ground intimately, the little force marched steadily forward and upward till they were well within a deep fold of the ground that entirely hid them from their late comrades. Not that there was much chance of their being seen, for it was now very dark. But their signals might have attracted attention, and, if news were being taken to the enemy, Tom was wise enough to know that those who sent it must be somewhere in the vicinity of our camps.

"We'll take every precaution to bamboozle 'em," he told Jack, with whom he had discussed matters. "They're hardly likely to notice our absence from the camp; for 4000 Portuguese irregulars were encamped beside us, and drew rations with us. Then, if they haven't seen us move off, and don't see our signals,

we shall be in a position to lay a snare to catch any who may be making for Ciudad Rodrigo. Now for a couple of fires."

Two flares were lighted almost at once, and, having been allowed to blaze for a few minutes, were stamped out again. Almost immediately an answering fire was seen right away above them. An hour or more later Alfonso put in an appearance with his command.

"We'll march directly up the valley, the Portuguese going first," said Tom. "Then we'll camp for the night. To-morrow we can introduce the men and make our plans for the future."

"What's the work?" asked Jack, whose interest and curiosity were keen. "Special orders?"

"Yes, there's news getting into Ciudad Rodrigo."

"Ah! Not surprised. We've heaps of loafers always round our camps, and a sly fellow might easily pick up information and take it to the enemy. You'll hunt round Ciudad Rodrigo, I suppose?"

"No," declared Tom abruptly. "I shall watch the outskirts of our camps. If a man leaves, he will be followed. If he comes in the direction of Ciudad Rodrigo, the information will be signalled to you. You will arrest and search him."

"I? You mean that you will," exclaimed Jack, for he was ever ready to concede the post of leader to his chum.

"No; you."

"But," began Jack, "why not you?"

"Because I shall be in Ciudad Rodrigo."

"In the town, behind the defences! That's risky, ain't it?" asked his friend.

"Orders," declared Tom light-heartedly. "I'm telling them to you in confidence. See here, Jack. Wellington has given us a nice little job, and we've to pull ourselves together and carry it out; information of our troops' movements is leaking out, and Wellington wishes to keep them very secret; for he intends to take Ciudad Rodrigo by assault. We've to cloak his movements by capturing all talebearers, and we've to get inside knowledge of the defences of Ciudad. Got it?"

Jack had. He pondered for a little while, and then approached the subject again. "How'll you fix the men?" he asked. "It's cold; there's been snow already."

"Then we must find quarters for all. I shall divide the force up, putting a hundred Portuguese in this neighbourhood, a hundred farther on, and the remainder spread away on the mountains, so that every pass is under observation. It will take a few days to fix matters, and then we shall really begin our work."

They lay down in their blankets that night, the two halves of the force, Portuguese and Spanish, being divided. Early on the following morning, when a meal had been cooked and eaten, the men were formed up, the two separate bands facing one another. Tom harangued them, telling the Portuguese how the Spanish half had conducted itself under the fire of the enemy, and how they had resisted an attack by

cavalry. To the Spaniards he spoke of the hardihood of the Portuguese, and their courage, though he omitted to mention the circumstances of the attack they had made on the church. Then he spoke of their mutual interests, and having called upon all to do their best, he dismissed the men for half an hour.

"Let them get together and compare notes," he said.

"It will make fast friends of them," agreed Alfonso. "You must remember that my men live right on the frontier, and yours also, so that they all speak a patois which is understood by the people in these parts. Let them talk. The fact that they have a British staff officer in command, with another to help him, and two British riflemen, will help not a little."

When the force moved off again there was no doubt that the men had fraternized wonderfully. To look at them there was very little difference in their appearance. All were well-built, hardy fellows, with fresh complexions, showing that they were accustomed to an open-air life. Short for the most part, they displayed wonderful activity, and were evidently at home in the mountains. It was three hours later when Tom halted the force, and let the men fall out to eat and rest.

"Here's where we place the first lot of our outposts," he told Jack, pointing to some cottages lying under the brow of a rise. "Those are deserted, and

will shelter our men well. Andrews will stay with them; for he has learned a little of the language. We will give them a share of the rations, and then push on. I have already given Andrews his orders. He is to post his men, half at a time, on every height commanding the roads from our camps, is to capture all who come this way, and, if a number are seen, is to signal by lighting a fire."

"And what happens when he's captured a man?" asked Jack.

"He sends him along to us."

"But you said 'you' a little while ago," Jack reminded him, with a grin.

"Us at first, you afterwards," said Tom ambiguously. "I dare say that puzzles you; wait till we catch a fellow and you'll see."

Three days later saw the whole of the force disposed, and when Tom and his two lieutenants reviewed the posts, they could not help but agree that they controlled all the roads communicating with Ciudad Rodrigo, and likely to be used by anyone leaving Wellington's camp. It was a week later when news reached our hero that a capture had been made. He was then within sight of Ciudad Rodrigo, hidden on a height from which he could look down at the fortress and town. Some six hours later Andrews arrived, having left his brother rifleman in charge of the post.

"Well?" asked Tom, as the man drew himself up and saluted.

"Captured a ruffian coming through our way early this morning, sir.

"And searched him?"

"Found these papers on him, sir. He did his best to get away, and when he saw we were bound to capture him, tried to destroy the papers; but our lads were too quick for him."

"Where is he?" asked Tom. "Bring him forward."

A rough, broad-shouldered individual was ushered into his presence between an escort of four of the Portuguese, and stood scowling at Tom.

"Portuguese?" asked our hero.

"No."

"Then Spanish?"

"No," came again the curt answer.

"Then what?"

"Spanish father, Portuguese mother. By what right do your men interfere with me?"

Tom ignored the question, and carefully investigated the papers Andrews had placed in his hands. There were a couple of rough maps, showing the British cantonments occupied by Wellington's troops, and a few lines of writing, drafted in a clear, good hand, and telling of the suspicion of the writer that Wellington was preparing to attack Ciudad Rodrigo.

"You have been then to Ciudad before?" asked Tom severely.

"That's my affair," came the rough answer.

"And you call yourself a patriot? Who were these

papers to be taken to? There is no address on the envelope."

A smile of triumph, and then a scowl, crossed the ill-favoured face of the man. It was obvious that he meant to give no information.

"Take him away," commanded Tom. "Mr. Barwood, put the prisoner up against that rock, and shoot him five minutes from now. Choose four of the men to carry out the sentence. There is not one who will not willingly obey and help to shoot a traitor."

He repeated the words in English to the astonished Jack, and then turned away abruptly. But a moment later a cry brought him facing round again, to discover the renegade on his knees, begging for his life.

"I will tell all," he wailed.

"Then speak, and take care that it is the truth, for you will be kept here for a while, and shot if we have doubts. Now, you have been to Ciudad Rodrigo before?"

The man shook his head emphatically.

"For whom were the papers intended?"

"For the general in command. But I was to deliver them to one who lives at a cabaret in the street of St. Angelo, and who would answer to the name of Francisco."

"And then?"

"I was to seek a lodging at the far end of the town, wait for a letter, and then return."

"To whom?" asked Tom curtly, while the men about strained their ears to hear what was passing.

"To my employer, *señor*."

"And he is——?"

"One whom I never met before. He lodges in a house in Oporto, and there I met him. His name I never heard. He is young and thin and dark. That is all I can tell you."

Tom stood thinking for a while, and then walked to a distance with Jack Barwood.

"Well?" he asked. "What would you do?"

"Send along to Oporto," declared his adjutant. "Get hold of this employer."

"And what about these papers?" asked Tom.

"I'd dispatch them to headquarters."

"Quite so; and then?"

"Then?" asked Jack, a little troubled. "Then I'd set the watch again and see if I could catch others."

"Good!" agreed Tom. "We'll do all that. Alfonso shall take a party to Oporto, carrying this fellow with him, with orders to scare him if he shows signs of lying. You shall send the papers to Wellington, with an explanation I shall write, and then I——"

"Yes?" gasped Jack, conscious that his friend had all the while been leading up to the declaration of some plan.

"I shall borrow this fellow's clothing. I'll write up a yarn which will do just as well as his papers, and then I'll seek out the owner of the cabaret in the

street of St. Angelo, the man known as Francisco, and there discover all that there is to be learned with regard to Ciudad Rodrigo."

It was a daring scheme to attempt; but then Tom had his orders. The following morning, in fact, found him stripped of his handsome staff uniform, and dressed in the clothes of their captive. He bade adieu to his comrades, went off down the height, and some two hours later was seen accosting the outposts placed by the French about the fortress. Jack and his friends, watching from above, saw their friend and leader disappear within a wide gateway. Thereafter, though they strained their eyes, there was not so much as a sign of him. He was gone altogether, swallowed by the massive defences of Ciudad Rodrigo, cut off from his friends, and surrounded by enemies who, if they discovered his disguise, would treat him as a spy and promptly shoot him.

CHAPTER XIII

Ciudad Rodrigo

"HALT! Stand fast and give the countersign!"

A huge French grenadier barred the road where it passed in beneath the frowning doorway of the fortress of Ciudad Rodrigo, and with his long bayonet dropped to the level of the chest of the intruder called upon him brusquely and in no uncertain tones to halt.

"The countersign," he demanded once more, peremptorily, the point of his weapon actually entangled in the stranger's clothing, while the look on the soldier's face seemed to say that he would willingly make a little error and transfix him. As for the latter, he was a well-grown, active, young fellow, with tousled hair dangling over his eyes, a general appearance of untidiness, and a something about him which denoted neither the genuine Spaniard nor the genuine Portuguese.

"Son of a dog no doubt," growled the sentry. "Neither fish nor flesh, nor yet good herring. A *peste* on these loafers about this place. Poof! If I were here I should be fighting, instead of swilling wine and idling as do these men. Well?" he called loudly. "The word?"

Tom looked up at the man from beneath the drawn-down brim of the tattered hat he had borrowed from the news bearer his men had captured. "Orleans", he murmured, putting into the word the queer accent to be expected of a stranger.

"Ha! Then enter; but whither? The dog may be a spy of the British," the man growled, and at the recollection, and the sudden suspicion, once more elevated the point of his weapon, and cleverly contrived to catch it in the lapel of Tom's coat.

"The street of St. Angelo," answered our hero under his breath, as if he were imparting a secret. "To one Francisco, with news, you understand?"

Apparently the man had learned some Spanish since the invasion of the Peninsula, and contrived to understand the words.

"Then enter," he cried. "Enter."

Down came the butt of his weapon with a clatter on the stones, while Tom passed on meekly. Indeed he was anxious to give the impression of one with little courage, merely a tale bearer. Also, he was in a hurry to get away from the Frenchman. For always he was dogged with the fear that he might by some evil chance come face to face with one of the troopers with whom he had fought the Portuguese peasants. However, the grenadier was not one of them. Tom left him standing at ease, and at once clambered up the steep way leading to the town. As for the grenadier, he watched the retreating figure of the stranger reflectively.

"A Spaniard? No," he told himself. "A Portuguese? *Parbleu!* Impossible! He has not the colouring. Then what? A mixture? No. Then—English!"

The very suspicion set him marching to and fro with energy. His musket flew to his shoulder, and then came down again with a bump. The grenadier was consumed with doubt for some few moments, and then with suspicion that soon became certainty. He called loudly for the serjeant of the guard, made his report, and was promptly relieved. A few minutes later he was hurrying in the direction Tom had taken, with three of his grenadier comrades to assist him.

"A fairly tall, broad-shouldered ragamuffin," he explained. "One with the appearance and manner of a coward at first sight, and with the frame and body of an athlete, and the eyes of one who has courage in abundance. Seek for him; if he fails to surrender on demand, shoot!"

It was a very pleasant prospect for Tom, and no doubt, had he known what was happening, he would have hastened his footsteps, and would have promptly taken measures to ensure his escape. But Tom had important work to do, work which required time and patience. First, there was the envelope to deliver, with the fictitious plans he had drawn, and the wording that told not of Wellington's anticipated attempt of Ciudad Rodrigo, but of his retirement towards Lisbon. In fact, Tom had fabricated a yarn which, if the governor of this fortress believed it,

would throw dust in his eyes and aid Wellington's plans enormously. Then there was a tour to be made of the defences, the guns to be located and counted, and any special works recorded on the plan he must draw. Our hero was, indeed, engaged on recognizance work of the utmost importance, work hardly likely to be facilitated by the three grenadiers who were making so hurriedly after him.

"The street of St. Angelo," he repeated to himself; "one Francisco."

Selecting a lad who was playing in the street, he enquired the way of him.

"Up there to the right, then to the left sharp. It's the last street in that direction," he was told, the boy evidently seeing nothing strange about him. Tom promptly took the direction indicated, and, following the turnings in succession, came to the street he was searching for.

"Francisco lives at a cabaret at the corner," he reminded himself. "There it is: 'Michael Francisco, dealer in wine.' And there's the fellow himself."

A beetle-browed, untidy individual was sitting just within the entrance to the cabaret, warming his toes at a charcoal brazier. From a room within came the sound of voices, the tinkle of a stringed instrument, and the chink of glasses, while from a spot still farther away, perhaps in the back regions of the dwelling, the voice of a scolding woman could be heard, drowning the other sounds completely for some few seconds.

Tom looked cautiously about him, and then sauntered up to the door.

"One Francisco?" he asked. "Of the street of St. Angelo?"

"The same," came the immediate answer, while the proprietor of the place looked him over sharply. "And you?"

"Someone with a message from Oporto for you to deal with. Here it is."

An exclamation of delight broke from the man, who at once seized the envelope. "You have orders to wait, then, my friend?" he asked.

"I have; I shall seek a lodging down the street. To-night I will come for the answer."

"Then step inside now and take a glass," the man said promptly. "To-night there shall be an answer. Come, a glass. Ho there, wine!" he shouted.

The scolding voice ceased of a sudden, while a woman appeared at the door of a room located at the end of the passage. Some five minutes later she brought a tray containing glasses, and poured wine into two of them.

"To our success!" cried Francisco, lifting his glass and speaking significantly.

"And may you get what every traitor deserves," thought Tom as he lifted his own allowance. "To you!" he cried, tipping the glass upward.

It was just at that moment that, glancing through the bottom of his upturned glass, and aslant through the open door of the cabaret, which being set at the

corner of the street commanded a long view of it, our hero caught sight of four French grenadiers hastening along it. At their head was one who was almost a giant! His flowing moustaches and the breadth of his shoulders seemed strangely familiar, while a second look convinced Tom that it was the very man who had stood sentry at the gate and had admitted him.

"Strange!" he thought. "They are the first soldiers I have seen in this direction, though there are others, of course. There are two in this cabaret at the moment, for I caught a glimpse of them. Ah, the big man is pointing! They are all hurrying—this looks ugly."

It was one of those situations where one engaged in dangerous work such as our hero had undertaken might very well be captured before he was more than aware of his danger. Hesitation might mean his downfall. On the other hand, if he were mistaken in the designs of the approaching grenadiers, and they had no concern with him, then action at the moment might lead to suspicion on the part of Francisco, which would be almost as bad. Tom screwed up his eyes and looked closely at the oncomers; then, seeing them turn towards the cabaret, he asked a question in the most unconcerned voice possible.

"Tell me," he said, "I may rest in here, upstairs where there is less noise? I have come fast from Oporto, and feel too tired even to seek for a lodging."

"Then pass up the stairs," came the answer, while

the innkeeper deposited his empty glass on the tray with a bang. "Pass upstairs, friend, and rest in the room overhead. In an hour perhaps, when I am free, I will go to the governor. There is no haste in these matters. Go now. I will attend to the customers who are now coming."

He turned to greet the grenadiers, now within ten yards of the door, while Tom lounged to the stairs, and then darted up them. At the top he stood and listened for a few moments.

"Ha!" he heard the big grenadier exclaim. "This is Francisco. Now, my friend, you have a caller. Where is he?"

That was enough for Tom. It was clear that he was suspected, and equally clear that if he did not hasten he would be captured within a few minutes. But how was he to get away? He opened the nearest door and thrust his head into the room to which it gave admittance. It was empty; there was nothing there to help him. He went then to the next, and peered into it noiselessly. There was nothing there either——"Ah!" Tom gave vent to a startled exclamation, for a man lay full length on a bed—a man who seemed to be sunk in the depths of sleep. Who was he?

He was across the room in an instant, bending over the man. Yes, he was sunk in a profound slumber, and, if Tom could have guessed it, Francisco's wine had something to say to the fellow's drowsiness. But whatever the cause Tom's attention

was instantly switched in another direction, for it appeared that the fellow had dragged off his clothing, and there, thrown carelessly on the floor, was the uniform of a French soldier.

"I think——" began our hero, cogitating deeply. "Ah! they're coming upstairs, that innkeeper and the grenadiers. I must chance it."

He stooped over the clothing, dragged the red breeches over his own, pulled them tight at the waist, and threw on the long-tailed surcoat so loved by the French. Round went the belt, hitching with a click, while the hat followed in a twinkling. Then he sat down, dragged off his boots, and was in the act of pulling on one belonging to the sleeper, when he heard footsteps on the landing outside and gruff voices.

"They'll look in here, and see that fellow asleep," he told himself. "No they won't, if I'm sharp. How's that?"

Very swiftly he sprang towards the bed and dragged a curtain into position, for the latter hung from a horizontal iron rod, and was intended to shut off a cubicle containing the bed. He had hardly got back to his seat, and was again pulling on a boot, when there came a thump at the door and again loud voices.

"I tell you that there is only a brother soldier of yours in here," he heard the innkeeper exclaim testily. "He is asleep, or was a little while ago. He has been here making merry with some friends, and fell

asleep down below. We carried him to bed and pulled off his clothes."

"Then if he is asleep, open and let us see him," he heard from the grenadier in villainous Spanish. "Open, man, in the name of the Emperor!"

There was another bang at the door, which at once flew open. Tom, with his back to the entrance, leaned over and pulled at the boot.

"Ha!" he heard from behind him. "The rascal! He is awake. Well, comrade?"

"Well," answered our hero in a dull, thick voice. "Well."

"That's you, eh?"

"Me, right enough," Tom coughed sleepily. "What's the time?"

"Time you were back in barracks," came the gruff answer.

The door banged, and again voices were heard on the landing.

"Not there," the grenadier told his friends. "The landlord is right. There is merely a sleepy, half-tipsy comrade. No wonder, too; these rascals of innkeepers sell the worst of wine at the highest figure. But search the other rooms. You, Jacques, stand at the head of the stairs; we will not have our bird bolting. Now, my man, lead on again."

Tom listened attentively, and wondered what his next move should be.

"Walk out in this uniform, I suppose. But it'd be risky; I'd be likely to be accosted by other soldiers.

I might get an order from an officer. Still, for the time being, it would do. But I must find some other disguise, for the whole garrison will soon be on the lookout for a young chap dressed like a civilian. I was suspicious of that grenadier; I was afraid he had spotted me. Ah, there they go!"

More voices reached his ear. The French grenadiers stopped at the head of the stairs and discussed the matter.

"Not here — flown through the far window," he heard one say. "Best be after him."

"See here, Jacques," came to his ear. "Go down to the main guard and warn them to send round to all the gates. If we don't get the spy here, we'll have him as he attempts to leave. Tell them to search every civilian."

There was a clatter outside the cabaret after that, and then silence. Tom peeped out of the door and found the landing empty. He turned, hearing a sound from the bed, to find the sleeper sitting up on one arm, drowsily regarding him from the edge of the curtain which he had drawn aside.

"What cheer, comrade!" the fellow gurgled with an inane smile. "Time for parade?"

"Not a bit," answered our hero promptly. "Get to sleep again. It'll clear your head. There; I'll draw the curtain."

He swung the curtain right across the end of the bed and heard the soldier flop down again on his pillows. Then, once more, he went to the door.

There was no one about, though on peering out of the window he saw the landlord standing in the street outside with a curious crowd about him.

"Said a spy had been here," he was shouting angrily. "As if I, Francisco, would harbour such an one. A spy indeed! What does an innkeeper have to do with spying?"

The crafty fellow did not tell the listeners that he was an agent of the French, the go-between for information of the movements of the British, the men who had come to the country to free himself and his nation from the grip of France. And he scouted the idea that his messenger could have been an Englishman, or the message he brought written by other than the traitor who hid himself in Oporto and hired rascals like himself in the neighbourhood of Wellington's camp. To this Francisco it was out of the question that Tom could be anything but what he represented himself to be. But that others thought differently was certain; for there was a bustle all over the defences. Tom could see squads of men marching swiftly. Mounted messengers galloped here and there, while a double company was massed at the gate by which he had entered.

"They've made up their minds that they've a spy here, and that's the end of it," he told himself. "Soon there'll be a call for all the troops, and this fellow here will be bustled out to join 'em. That'll be awkward. What can I do? Ah, let's see what the other rooms contain!"

He went scuttling across the landing and dived into a room almost opposite. It belonged, probably, to the daughter of the house, for it was neat and tidy, while a couple of dresses hung on the wall. Tom pulled a cupboard open and peeped in.

"Got it!" he cried. "Here's the very thing—a sort of mantilla. Now for the dress and anything else likely to come handy."

He swept up an armful and dived back to the room he had been occupying. There he threw off the French uniform and dressed himself in the new garments he had secured.

"Not half bad," he grinned, as he stood before a cracked glass perched on a rickety table. "My uncle, as Jack would say, but I'm not half bad-looking when dressed as a girl! Am I right, though? Wish I knew more about these things. If only there was another glass I'd be able to see what my back looks like. Now, we practise walking. Gently does it. Hang this skirt! Nearly took a header that time, and—yes—I've torn the thing badly. Want a pin for that. Got it—here it is, just handy."

Afraid? Not a bit of it; Tom wasn't that. Merely hugely excited, for the occasion was somewhat strenuous. The noise outside, the blare of bugles, the rattle of drums and the clatter of moving troops told him that plainly. Also he guessed, and guessed rightly, that he was the cause of all the bustle. He swung the mantilla over his head, half-swathed his face in it, took one last look at his reflection, and

then went to the door. No one was moving upstairs; the coast was clear.

"Straight bang for the window," he told himself. "Wonder what's below? Wouldn't there be a howl if they saw a girl dropping from one. Here we are. This'll do—out we go!"

There was a sheer drop of ten or more feet into an enclosed yard at the back of the house; but a door led from the yard into a lane, and that promised to give access to one of the streets. Tom did not wait a moment. Indeed, the sound of steps on the stairs hastened him, while, as if everything must needs conspire to thwart his hopes, the door he had so recently closed on the sleeping soldier opened, and that individual staggered out on to the landing. By then Tom was half through the window. He waited not an instant, but swung himself down and dropped to the ground. Dashing across to the gate he was through it in a few moments.

"Steady does it," he murmured, finding it extremely difficult to obey the order and to refrain from running. "There's that idiot grinning at me from the window. Ah, that places me out of sight! Guess he's considerably astonished."

There was little doubt but that the soldier was flabbergasted. In his sleepy, maudlin condition he found it very hard to understand the meaning of the scene he had but just witnessed. He was filled with a stupid admiration of the pluck of the damsel he had seen leap from the window, but felt

no further interest. His muddled mind asked for no reason for such behaviour, while his ignorance of the commotion then filling the place, and of the search that was being made for a spy, left him merely admiring a feat which was to him extraordinary.

As for Tom, he stepped down the lane and was soon in the main street, that of St. Angelo. A crowd of excited individuals of all ages and of both sexes was hastening down towards the main guard, and, since he could do nothing better, he went with them, safer in their midst than he could have been in any other position. Parties of soldiers passed them constantly, while all down the street houses were being searched, and every civilian of the male sex stopped and closely questioned. As a result there was an extraordinary hubbub. Women shrieked indignantly from their windows, resenting such intrusion, while men stood sullenly at their doors, looking as if they would have gladly murdered the Frenchmen.

"Seems to me that I've dropped on the only real disguise," Tom chuckled. "But there's one thing to be remembered: if the daughter of Francisco goes to her room she will discover what has happened, then there'll be another flare up. Time I looked into the business part of this thing seriously."

He had come carefully armed with a small notebook and pencil, and, having in the past two months received some instruction in sketching, he felt sure that he had only to use his eyes, and discover a retired spot, when he would be able to gather a sufficiently

correct plan of the defences. Indeed he strolled about, first with one batch of excited inhabitants and then with another, till he had made a round of the place, retiring now and again to some quiet corner where he jotted down his observations. Every gun he saw was marked, every earthwork drawn in with precision. A few careful questions gave him the position of stores and magazines, while a little smiling chat with a French sentry, who seemed to admire this girl immensely, put Tom in possession of the strength of the garrison, the name of the general in command, and the fact that other troops were nowhere in the vicinity.

"Then it's time to think of departing. That'll be a conundrum," he told himself. "Couldn't drop over the walls, that's certain. Halloo! mounted men have been sent out to cut me off should I try to make a dash from the place. This is getting particularly awkward."

It was well past noon by now, and Tom was getting ravenously hungry. He stood amongst a group of civilians on one of the walls of the place looking out towards the part where Jack and his men were secreted. Troopers could be seen cantering here and there, while others were halted at regular intervals, and stood beside their horses prepared to mount and ride at any moment. Strolling along with his new acquaintances our hero was soon able to get a glimpse of the other side of Ciudad Rodrigo and its surroundings there. But there was not a break

in the line of troopers circling the place. It was evident, in fact, that no effort was to be spared to capture the fellow whom the grenadier had first suspected. Nor was there any doubt in the mind of the French general that his suspicion was justified; for Francisco had now disgorged the papers Tom had handed him, and these on inspection proved to be wanting in one particular. The secret sign of the agent who was supposed to have sent them, which was always attached to such papers, was lacking, proof positive that the news was false and the bearer an enemy.

It was, perhaps, two or three hours after noon when Tom mixed with a crowd of curious citizens at the very gate which he had entered that morning, and watched as soldiers came and went. Sometimes a civilian would pass through also, though in every case he was closely inspected. As for the women and children, as yet they had not ventured out. But curiosity soon got the better of them. A laughing dame thrust her way through, the guard passing her willingly. Then the others pressed forward, and in a little while Tom was outside, sauntering here and there, wistfully looking at those hills which he had left in the morning.

"And still as far away as ever," he told himself. "Wish I could get hold of a horse—that would do it. What's the matter now? There's another disturbance in the town; people are shouting. Here's a trooper galloping out."

By then he was some distance from the outer wall, but still within the ring of dismounted troopers. And, as he had observed, there was another commotion. In a few minutes, indeed, there was a movement amongst the civilians. Those nearest the gate were hastening back, while troopers galloped out to fetch in stragglers. One of these came dashing up to the group Tom accompanied.

"Get back through the gates," he commanded brusquely.

"And why?" asked the same laughing dame who had led the movement from the fortress. "Why, friend?"

"Because there is a vixen amongst you who is not what she seems," the man answered angrily. "There's information that this spy borrowed women's clothing; you may be he. We'll have to look into the matter —back you all go."

He was a rough fellow, who held no love for these people, and riding amongst them actually upset the woman who had spoken, causing her to shriek aloud.

"Coward!" she cried, picking herself up with difficulty and trembling at his violence.

"Eh!" exclaimed the brute, angered at the taunt. "Now bustle, and keep a civil tongue between your teeth—bustle, I say."

He edged his horse still closer, till the woman fell again, terrified by the close approach of the animal the trooper rode.

"Shame!" cried Tom, his gorge rising. "Do the French then fight with women?"

He had called out in the voice of a woman, and looked, in fact, merely a young girl. But that made little difference to this brute of a trooper. He set his horse in Tom's direction, and looked as if he would actually ride over him. And then there was a sudden and unexpected change; for the young girl displayed the most extraordinary activity. She leaped aside, darted in, and sprang up behind the trooper. For a moment there was a tussle; and then the trooper was lifted from his saddle and tipped out on to the ground. Before the astonished and frightened crowd of women could realize what was happening, or the trooper gather a particle of his scattered wits, the girl was firmly planted in his place, her feet were jammed in the stirrups, and there was presented to all who happened to be looking in that direction as strange a sight as could be well imagined. Shrieks filled the air; men shouted hoarsely to one another, while the troopers standing at their horses' heads leaped into their saddles.

"It is the spy! It is the English spy!" was shouted from the walls. "The spy!" bellowed the bullying soldier whom Tom had unhorsed, making a funnel of his hands and turning to the trooper who was nearest.

"Follow!" came in stentorian tones from the nearest officer.

Then began a race the like of which had never

been witnessed outside Ciudad Rodrigo. Tom clapped the heels of his French boots to the flanks of his borrowed horse, while the mantilla that had done him such service, caught by the breeze, went blowing out behind him. Bending low, he sent the animal galloping direct for the hills, smiling grimly as the crack of carbines came from behind him.

"Jack'll be up there waiting," he thought as he glanced ahead. "He'll soon send these fellows back once they get within shot. Pah! That was a near one; the bullet struck my boot. Beg pardon, not my boot, but that fellow's at the cabaret. Glad there's no horsemen in front of me. So much the better; it's going to be a fine gallop."

A fine gallop it proved, too. His mount was blown before the chase was over, while had it lasted a little longer he would certainly have been taken. But of a sudden heavy musketry fire broke out from a point a little to one side. Dark figures, clad in the well-known rough uniform of Tom's guerrillas, appeared on the hillside. And then a shrill whistle sounded. It was perhaps a minute later that Tom threw himself from his horse and stood amongst his comrades. And how Jack roared with laughter, how the men grinned their delight, how Andrews, who had but just reached the party spluttered and attempted to behave as became a disciplined soldier!

"Introduce me, do," gurgled Jack, seizing Alfonso by the arm and doubling up with merriment. "Miss what's-her-name, eh?"

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TOM ESCAPES FROM CIUDAD RODRIGO

"Clifford, at your service," grinned Tom, "and don't you forget it!"

"Of all the boys!" spluttered Andrews, his face red with his efforts. "I knew he had backbone, but this here's something different."

"Allow me," said Jack in his most gallant manner, offering an arm. "Excuse me if I appear a little forward."

"Rats!" was Tom's somewhat abrupt answer. "Let the boys fall in. We'll march at once; I've had a spree, I can tell you."

It was with grins of delight and many an exclamation that his comrades listened to the tale, a narrative soon passed on by Alfonso to their following. Meanwhile Tom tore his borrowed clothing from him, donned his handsome uniform, and made ready for more active movement.

"We've done a good part of our work," he said. "Now for that fellow in Oporto. Let's ride back to the camp, leaving some of our men to watch the roads near it. I'll hand my notes in to the chief of the staff, and then look into the last part of this matter. Wonder who the rogue is who's such a friend of Francisco, and sends news to the men that are enemies of his country."

They might all wonder, and the reader need not feel surprised if he learns that this rascal was too clever for those who sought him. The hovel to which the man whom Tom's guerrillas had captured led them—and who had promised information in return

for his life—was empty. There was no particle of evidence to prove where the rascal had flown; but careful search discovered a note hidden in a crevice of the ceiling, and when that was opened the information contained proved to be of little value.

"Come to Badajoz," it said. "There ask for Juan de Milares, in the street of St. Paulo. There is still work to be done and money to be earned for the doing."

"Same handwriting without a doubt," declared Jack emphatically. "The bird's flown, and Badajoz is out of the question."

As a general rule one would have agreed with him; for, like Ciudad Rodrigo, that fortress was garrisoned by the French. But circumstances alter cases, and Tom soon recognized this to be a fact, since there was further information awaiting him in Oporto. A visit to the house of Septimus John Clifford & Son discovered something approaching a tragedy. For Juan de Esteros had disappeared that very evening, and with him no less a person than Septimus John Clifford himself.

"But where?" demanded Tom, filled with apprehension.

"Alas, there is nothing to tell us!" answered the chief clerk, as faithful a fellow as the worthy Huggins. "They left without a word to anyone, without so much as a sound. They dined together and sat on the veranda reading. Later they retired to their rooms; after that we know nothing."

"But," exclaimed Tom, aghast at the mystery, "surely there's——"

"There is merely this," came the answer, while a slip of paper was thrust into his hands. "We found it resting on the table, weighted so that it could not blow away. Read, *señor.*"

Tom scanned the lines for some few moments, while his smooth forehead wrinkled deeply. "Thus is the house of Septimus John Clifford & Son punished," he read, the Spanish letters being scrawled across the paper. Yes scrawled. In a moment he recognized that writing. It was put upon the paper by the selfsame man who had sent information to the commandant at Ciudad Rodrigo, the traitor who was eager and willing to supply news which would help the enemies of his country.

"Well? What next?" asked Jack when the fact had been explained to him.

"To Badajoz, that's all," came the short answer. "This villain's got hold of my father and uncle for some reason or other. It's plainly my duty to look into the matter; so I'll pay Badajoz a visit, just as I went to Ciudad Rodrigo. Wonder who this chap is and what game he's up to? But duty first, Jack; we'll make back to the camp and see what's expected of us."

If Tom had hoped to pursue a private matter just then he was to be disappointed. For barely was Christmas past, and the new year entered upon, when Wellington threw the whole force he com-

manded against Ciudad Rodrigo. Pressing the siege with intense energy—for there was always the fear that the French would concentrate on him from all parts and raise the siege before it was successfully over—he launched his attacking parties after remarkably short delay. The fighting which resulted was of the severest description, and the greatest gallantry and resolution was shown by either side. But British pluck won. The defences were captured, and within a few hours of the assault the place which Tom had visited was garrisoned by British instead of by French soldiers. Then Wellington turned toward Badajoz, outside which Tom and his men had for two weeks past thrown out a circle of their men, thus cutting all communications.

"It'll be a hard nut to crack," observed the merry Jack, casting his eye up at the defences; "but I suppose we'll do it."

"We must," declared Tom with emphasis. "Anyway, I've got to get inside the place and unravel this mystery. There's father and Don Juan to find and release, and then there's that rascal who took them."

But would Tom, or indeed any of our men, ever get within this terribly grim fortress? It seemed unlikely enough, viewing the defences, and we may declare here and now that before our hero was to set foot within the place he was to take part in fighting of the very fiercest.

CHAPTER XIV

One of the Forlorn Hope

"A TERRIBLY hard nut to crack," observed Jack, for perhaps the twentieth time, as he and Tom sat their horses on a ridge above Badajoz, and looked down upon the fortress. "It'll be interesting to see how Wellington sets about the matter. Suppose there'll be a tremendous cannonade, and then an assault. Wish we were going to be in it."

"I mean to, whatever happens," came from our hero, who was staring down at the fortress, as if he wished to guess in which house his father and Don Juan were imprisoned. "As to how it'll be done, there's no saying; for I've never witnessed a siege before. But apparently the sappers and miners dig their way toward the fortress, erecting batteries as they go, till they are so close that our guns can batter down the walls. Then comes the grand assault. I can imagine that that is a terrific business. Well, let's ride round the place and see what's happening. There's very little else for us to do just now, and we can leave the men with Alfonso."

For two weeks past the combined command of Portuguese and Spanish guerrillas whom Tom had

charge of had been operating about the magnificent fortress which Wellington had determined to capture. Throwing a circle completely about the place, they had cut the garrison off entirely from the outside world, and thus had enabled Wellington to concentrate his men without alarming the French. For here again, as in the case of Ciudad Rodrigo, it was all-important that the siege operations should not be disturbed by the arrival of a large French force, against whom our troops would have to act before taking the fortress. As in the case of Ciudad Rodrigo, had information leaked out the enemy could easily have concentrated a force in the neighbourhood, sufficient to delay and make impossible all siege operations. But, thanks to secrecy in his preparations, thanks, too, in no small measure to the work of such corps as Tom commanded, the intentions of Wellington were quite unknown, till, of a sudden, in the March following his capture of Ciudad Rodrigo, he turned his divisions in the direction of Badajoz, a fortress sometimes known as "the gate of Spain", and, crossing the River Guadiana on the 16th, caused the place to be invested by the three divisions commanded by Beresford and Picton. The remainder of his troops, some 60,000 in all, counting Spanish and Portuguese allies, covered the siege operations.

Looking down from the point of vantage to which they had ridden, Tom and his chum could obtain a bird's-eye view of the ancient fortress of Badajoz,

and could easily trace its outline. But the arrival of a staff officer helped them wonderfully to understand what was occurring before their eyes. Cantering up the hill at this moment, and looking the smart fellow he was, this officer drew rein close to the two young fellows, acknowledging their salutes with one as brisk, and with a smile.

"Taking the air?" he asked. "We shall have plenty of it before we've done with the Frenchies. Ah! that's Clifford, I believe."

Tom saluted again and flushed.

"The officer the French refuse to fight, eh?"

Our hero was compelled to agree, with heightened colour, whereat the officer laughed loudly.

"And his adjutant along with him, too," he remarked, looking the unabashed Jack up and down, and reflecting that he seemed to be a very smart and jovial fellow. "You chaps know how you're spoken of, perhaps, eh?" he asked with another smile, causing both the lads to shake their heads.

"Then I'll tell you. Never is one seen but the other is at his heels. So throughout the army you're known as the "twins". Good name, isn't it?"

Once more they heard his hearty laughter, which they shared with him; for this was news to our two heroes. Not that they could help admitting that there was reason for the name they had earned, since Jack Barwood had become Tom's veritable shadow. They seemed to haunt the same piece of ground

always, and even when with their command the jovial Jack was ever at the side of his superior. There was a whisper also amongst the men, fostered not a little by voluble sayings of Andrews and his brother rifleman, that these two young officers, occupying such posts of responsibility, were nevertheless not above a little skylarking. Indeed, if Tom and Jack had proved that they were eager and ready to lead their men into action, they had also more than once shown a disposition to lead them into mischief.

"Well, now, let's have a look at the place," said the officer, producing a short spyglass. "You can see for yourselves how the fortress is placed. It stands on an eminence at the junction of the Rivers Guadiana and Rivillas, the former being crossed by a long bridge, which you can see for yourself. There's the castle, perched a hundred feet above the level of the rivers, and occupying almost the apex of the point of confluence. The town spreads behind it fan-wise, and is walled, presenting eight strong bastions, with curtains, counterscarps, glacis, and covered ways, without doubt, all helping to make the place extremely strong. There are five gates, though you can't see them all from this point. There, take a look; you can actually observe people moving in the streets."

The view was, in fact, an enchanting one; for Badajoz at that time was not an erection of a few years, but one of great antiquity. It had withstood sieges against the Moors and Goths, and had been

taken and retaken many a time; and there it was fully prepared for another siege, garrisoned by some 5000 of the enemy, and packed to repletion with guns, ammunition, and food; in fact with all that makes defence possible.

"And how will the siege be conducted?" asked Tom, when he had taken a long look at the place. "Shall we endeavour to make a breach at one point or at many?"

"Many," came the short answer. "No doubt Wellington will launch his attacking parties in several directions. But first he must smash up that work you see on the far side of the river, known as Fort Picurina. Batteries will be placed elsewhere, and I believe the angle nearest us has been selected, as well as that farthest away, close to the Trinidad and St. Vincent bastions respectively. In a few hours the guns will be thundering in a manner which will open your eyes."

The bombardment that followed was, in fact, a revelation to our hero; for, though Wellington might easily have been better equipped for a siege, and have had a far superior battering train, the guns he possessed were nevertheless of service. Nor must it be forgotten that these same guns had been brought into position only after the very greatest labour and secrecy; for they had been sent round by sea from Lisbon, had then been transported up the River Setubal in small boats, to Alcacer do Sal, and thence by land across the Alemtejo to the River Guadiana.

Think of the labour involved in such an operation, of the secrecy necessary to keep the movement from the knowledge of the French. Think also of the small army of helpers, all taking part in this war, and yet working out of sound of gun shot, and far from the presence of the enemy. That, perhaps is a question which escapes the notice of many. The tale of some campaign brings to light narratives of gallant deeds, of fierce attacks, of strenuous fighting; it leaves too often to the imagination of one ignorant of the life of a soldier, and of the needs of a campaign, all the numerous services upon which success of an army in the field depends. For if there be no one to supervise the stores, and to dispatch them to the seat of war, how can troops operate in a country devoid almost of food, where ammunition cannot be obtained, and where boots, clothing, and a thousand other necessary trifles wear out, are lost, or destroyed with alarming rapidity? Think, then, of the host labouring out of sight of the enemy, but labouring nevertheless. Think also of the other numerous band marching with troops as non-combatants, and yet subject to as great dangers, the very same privations, and bearing on their shoulders equal, if not greater, responsibilities; for with the troops there must be men to see to the distribution of food, to gather stores, and apply for all that is necessary. There must be trained officers to look to the ailments of horses, and, above all, perhaps, there must be an army of surgeons to care for the wounded and the

thousands more who go down under privation and exposure.

Riding round the bivouacs of the besieging army after their chat with the staff officer, Tom began to gather a better impression than he had ever had before of the numerous duties attached to soldiering.

In the background, well away from the investing regiments, were many horse lines, where rows of animals were picketed, their riders being encamped near at hand. Closer to the fortress lay the lines of regiments engaged in the actual work of the siege, and here many a camp fire blazed. Whole rows of camp kettles sat over the long trenches dug in the muddy ground, while the flames from wood fires swept beneath them and sent billows of odorous steam into the air. Butchers were at work slaughtering beasts bought for the feeding of the troops, while not far away a sentry stood guard over a spring which was the drinking supply for that portion of the army. But it was still nearer the fortress that the real interest lay; for there hundreds of men were delving, cutting trenches, and steadily advancing them toward the enemy. Indeed, that very day, they had need of every bit of cover; for guns opened from Badajoz, and clouds of grapeshot swept across the open.

"Hot work, ain't it?" grinned Jack, who with Tom was making a tour of inspection. "Put your head up, Tom, and take a squint at those Frenchies."

"And get it shot to pieces for my trouble. Thanks!" came the laughing answer. "George! Listen to that."

"My uncle!" came from the young adjutant. "A regular torrent. How long and how often do they pepper you like that?" he asked of the sapper ensign who had invited them to inspect the work.

"How often? Couldn't say," was the laconic answer, as if the thunderous discharge of the guns of the enemy, and the roar of clouds of grape sweeping overhead were an everyday occurrence, and hardly worth discussion. "Oh, pretty often, especially at night! But it'd be all right if it weren't for this awful weather. You see, a chap has to grovel when the guns open, and that's bad for uniforms."

He was something of a dandy, this immaculate ensign of sappers, and stepped daintily along the deep trenches already constructed by the British working parties. Tom watched him with admiration as he brushed some dirt from his laced sleeve with a silk handkerchief, and then wondered satirically for one brief moment if this young officer were merely a heap of affectation, useless for any real work, merely an ornament to the profession to which he belonged.

"Certainly not that," he told himself a few seconds later, after seeing more of the ensign. "He's a born dandy, perhaps, but he's a plucky beggar, and a fine example to his men."

That, in fact, was precisely what this ensign was,

as was the case with many another officer in Wellington's army. Example is everything when men are engaged in strenuous operations; and if those in command show coolness, determination, sangfroid, and other virtues, their own particular men are wonderfully heartened. And here was this ensign coolly flicking dirt from his laced sleeve, while a foot overhead grapeshot swept past in a torrent. There he was, joking and laughing with the jovial Jack as if he had not so much as a serious thought in his head, and as if this were merely a game. But a minute later he was leading the way to an outwork, strolling negligently across a portion necessarily exposed to the bullets of the enemy, and showing not so much as a sign of haste.

"Come along," he sang out to our hero. "It's a little warm crossing, but it's generally all right. We had three caught by the enemy's bullets yesterday, but that's because they would stop to star gaze. Ah, very neat shooting, eh? I declare, the beggar has cut one of my epaulettes off with his shot!"

It was true enough. Tom had heard a shot fired from the fortress, for the trench they had just left was within long range of an outwork manned by the enemy. He had instantly seen the left epaulette of the ensign rise in the air, spin round merrily, and then fall to the ground. And the young officer only showed annoyance at such an injury being done to his uniform! As for the men stationed in the trench behind, and those in the earthwork for which they

were making, they watched the little scene with grins of amusement and delight.

"Dicky Silvester, ensign. That's him," growled one of the sappers hoarsely to his neighbours. "Joined us a year ago, or less, and looks and acts as if he were a born soldier, and didn't care a fig for bullets or anything else. Who are the other orfficers? Ain't they cool 'uns too? My hat, Dicky ain't the only one as don't give a hang for bullets!"

The cool behaviour of the three even raised a cheer before they had entered the earthwork, calling a sharp order from the ensign.

"What's this?" he demanded, dropping slowly out of shot of the enemy, a manœuvre which Tom and Jack followed. "Laughing and cheering when there's work to be done! Here——"

Another patch of dirt on his uniform distracted his attention and cut short the speech. As for the men, they dashed their picks again into the ground and went on with their delving. Then whispers passed amongst them.

"Blessed ef I don't think as the toff of an orfficer in staff uniform ain't Mr. Tom Clifford, him as held up them Portuguese in a church, commanding the Frenchies who'd taken him as prisoner," said one. "Ain't that the one?"

"And went right into Ciudad Rodrigo t' other day," agreed his comrade, "and come galloping out dressed as a gal. He's the boy. Law! He looks at Badajoz as if he was hungry to get inside, and

had more almost to do with this siege than we have."

Tom might indeed have been accused of that, for those wretchedly wet days in March, 1812, found him frequently in the trenches, watching as parallels were dug, eagerly measuring the advance of the busy army of sappers digging their way closer to the fortress. Or he would lie behind one of the batteries by day and by night, and would listen to the thunder of the guns, and would watch for the tell-tale spout of dust which shot into the air as the huge iron ball struck the bastion. Then would come the clatter of falling masonry, followed perhaps by a cheer from the gunners. More often the shot would be answered by a terrific hail of grape, which pattered overhead, swept the entire face of the batteries—and but for the fascines erected to give cover every one of the gunners would have been killed—then whizzed across the open, splashing into the many pools of water which had been left by the heavy and almost continuous rain. It seemed, indeed, slow work this siege operation; slow and perhaps not too sure.

"For even when the breaches are practicable there are the defenders to be dealt with," thought Tom. "There will be mines to blow us up, obstructions of every sort, and grape and shot showered down upon us. But take the place we will; I mean to be one of the very first inside the fortress."

Any doubts Tom may have had as to the determination of Lord Wellington were soon set at rest;

for, the weather still continuing atrocious, and the trenches being flooded and almost uninhabitable, an assault of the Picurina was ordered, and the fort carried with brilliant dash by 500 men of the 3rd Division. The storm of shot and shell poured into the fort after we had gained possession of it was such that one wondered how the new garrison could live, for Phillipon, the commander of the French, did his utmost to drive us out. But our men stuck grimly to the task, and again plying their busy spades, soon had advanced to a point where batteries could be erected. And then began a trial of skill and endurance between the gunners of France and those of England. By day and by night the neighbourhood echoed to the roar. A pall of smoke hung over fortress and encampment, while in the depths of night guns flashed redly, and spluttering portfires hovered here and there as the gunners stood to their pieces. At length the work was done; the breaches were declared practicable, though to view them and the grim lines hovering in rear, prepared to defend every inch of the steeply-sloping rubbish, would have caused any but brave men to shiver. But Wellington's men were as determined as he; they had set their hearts on gaining the fortress. The call for a forlorn hope, as ever, produced a swarm of volunteers. That night of 6 April, a night the anniversary of which is ever kept with loving memory by those who now serve in the regiments then present at Badajoz, found 18,000 bold fellows craving for the signal which

should launch them to the attack, craving for the signal which, alas! would launch many and many a gallant officer and lad into eternity. Let us, too, remember those heroes with honour, recollecting that by their gallantry and dash they helped in the work in progress, and that every fortress won in this Peninsula campaign was yet another step forward, a step that would add to the difficulties of Bonaparte, and which, with those which followed, ultimately brought about his downfall. Let us honour them as gallant souls who cast off the yoke then weighing upon the peoples of Europe.

"You'll go with the stormers?" asked Jack of Tom, almost beneath his breath, as the two stood side by side in the trenches.

"I've obtained permission, and go I shall," came the determined answer. "Now recollect, Jack, what I've said. If Badajoz is taken, the rascal who has captured my people will do his best to get out of the place. See that our men are lively when the first streak of dawn comes, and let them arrest any civilian."

"Good luck! Take care," gasped Jack, loath to part with his old friend. "I'll watch outside and see that all is done as you've directed; but do take care. Recollect, the regiment can't do without you."

He was sent off with a merry laugh from Tom, and straightway clambered up a rise from which he could view the proceedings. A strange silence hung about the fortress. Within and without the trenches, packed

in the batteries, and in many another part lay the stormers, waiting, waiting for that signal. Picton's division on the right crouched over their scaling ladders, ready to rush to the walls of the castle. On the left, Sir James Leith's division waited to make a false attack on the Pardeleras, an outside work. But the Bastion de San Vincente was the real point of attack, and Walker's brigade, part of this division, was destined to assault it. The Light Division was to dash for the Santa Maria quarter, while the 4th was to hurl itself against the breach in the Trinidad quarter. The St. Roque bastion, in between these two latter, was to be stormed by Major Wilson, who was in command of the guards of the trenches. Finally, the Portuguese were to see what could be done with the Tête de Pont, the outwork on the far bank of the River Guadiana, commanding the head of the bridge.

A dull hum above the trenches told of excitement. Flickering lights and a subdued murmur above the fortress showed that the defenders were prepared. Silently men gathered before the 4th and the Light Division, men provided with ladders and axes, with but few rounds of ammunition, and freed of their knapsacks. Each carried a sack filled with hay, which, it was hoped, would give some cover. And before those two parties waiting in front of the two divisions, and each counting 500 men, there fell in yet again two parties of heroes, the forlorn hopes, the officers and men who were sworn to enter the fortress, to show the way in, or to die in the attempt, noble

souls who worked not for gold as a reward, but only for the honour and glory of their country.

Ah! a blaze of light from a carcass hurled from the wall showed one of those advance parties. Shouts echoed from the fortress, then there came the splash of flame from guns, the spurting tongues of fire belched from muskets, and the thunder of the explosions. Cheers and hurrahs broke from our men. What matter if the alarm had been sounded half an hour before Wellington was to give the fatal signal? They were ready—the boys of the Light Brigade, the heroes of the 4th Division — the stormers all along the walls were ready. A mad babel broke the former silence or semi-silence, portfires flashed in all directions, while fireballs were hurled into the ditches, lighting the way of the stormers. Pandemonium was let loose at Badajoz that night. A cloudy, star-strewn sky looked down upon horrors which one hopes may never be repeated. For on the side of the French was shown great bravery and demoniacal cunning. Every artifice of the besieged was employed, while on the side of the British soldiers a mad, a frantic courage was displayed. What if mines did burst and blow hundreds to pieces? Their comrades dashed down into the ditch without hesitation, and cast themselves into the selfsame breach where the tragedy had been perpetrated. What if the enemy did cast bags of gunpowder into the confused ranks of the stormers? It was all the more inducement to them to dash onward.

To describe all that occurred would be beyond us. Let us follow our hero, though, and see what happened in his direction. Tom was one of the forlorn hope. Shouldering his hay pack, and gripping his sword, he dashed at the breach before him when the alarm was given. The stunning discharge of a cannon to his front almost swept him from his feet, and cleared a lane through the comrades before him. A fireball danced down the steep slope of the breach and blazed brightly, showing the faces and figures of the enemy plainly, the muskets they were levelling, and an appalling *chevaux de frise* erected at the top of the breach. Composed of naked sabre blades secured to logs of wood, this obstacle awaited the stormers before they could come to hand grips with the enemy. But that was not all. Tom stumbled over a boulder, floundered on to his face, and was then lifted boldly and flung aside by a mighty concussion.

"A mine," he thought. "Am I alive or not? What's happened to the others?"

He might well ask that. The poor fellows were swept out of existence almost to a man; but behind them were the noble five hundred, and in rear again the gallant Light Division. Before them was the breach; that terrible breach, with its defenders, its guns, its awful obstacle, and the hundred-and-one means there for the destruction of the stormers. Time and again did men dash at it. Gallant souls, driven crazy by the hazard they endured, and filled

with fearful determination, clambered to that *chevaux de frise* and were there slaughtered. Officers stood in full sight of the enemy calling to their men, leading them upward. And yet none could enter.

Elsewhere the fighting had been equally strenuous. After many and many an attempt the castle was at length won, and later Walker's brigade tore its gallant way over the San Vincente Bastion, victorious in spite of mines and guns fired at point-blank range. It was from that quarter, in fact, that success at length came; for the Light and the 4th Divisions had as yet failed to burst their way through the breaches before them. But an advance from the direction of San Vincente took the defenders in the rear, and just as our men had retired at the orders of Wellington, preparatory to a fresh attack, those breaches were taken. Men burst in now from all directions; the enemy fled for the most part to Fort Christoval, over the river, and Badajoz was ours. Cheers and counter cheers were heard in all quarters. The wounded sat up as best they could and joined in the jubilation, and then pandemonium again broke out in every street of the city; for the victorious troops straightway got out of hand. They poured in a torrent through the streets of Badajoz, rifling the houses, and, breaking into the cabarets, helped themselves to the wines of Spain. That early morning, in fact, discovered a terrible situation in the fortress; for of order there was none. Drunken soldiers staggered over the pavements committing

violence everywhere, while as many more were pillaging or doing actual violence to the unfortunate inhabitants. And all that while Tom Clifford lay on the slope of the breach which with many another gallant soul he had endeavoured to storm. Regiments passed over him. The surgeons and their bearers came and went in search of the wounded, and passed him always. For Tom lay stark and still. With his face half-buried in the torn tunic of a soldier who had died while doing his duty, and his limbs curled up as if he were asleep, he lay without a movement, appearing not even to breathe, lifeless to those who cast a casual glance at him.

"Dead!" groaned Jack and Andrews when at length they found him. "Killed by the mine which wiped out every man of 'the forlorn hope'. Poor Tom!"

"Breathing!" shouted Alfonso, who also accompanied him. "I tell you he is still alive."

That brought them all about him, and within a few minutes our hero was being carried from the breach. But was he living still? Was Badajoz to see the end of a promising career, and put a stop to his quest? Or would Tom Clifford appear upon the scenes again, and still have something to say to the rascal who had abducted both father and uncle?

CHAPTER XV

Round about Badajoz

THERE was a business-like air about the jovial Jack Barwood on the second morning after the fall of Badajoz, a seriousness about the smart young adjutant to which his friends were unaccustomed, a furrowing of his youthful brow, and an appearance of intentness and determination which would have aroused the friendly satire of old comrades. Dressed in the smart uniform of the gallant 60th Rifles, he marched briskly along one of the quieter streets, passing as he did so a half-company of infantry escorting a batch of semi-drunken soldiers, the gallant souls amongst Wellington's army who, now that the fighting was over, had lost all sense of discipline, and, aching no doubt for the many good things to which they had been strangers for so long, had burst their way into private dwellings and had behaved like scoundrels instead of brave soldiers.

Jack took the salute of a Portuguese guerrilla sentry marching sedately to and fro before a huge door, and that too of a Spaniard, one also of the band under Tom's command.

"Well?" he questioned in Portuguese, his accent none of the best. "Any news? Any more callers?"

"None, *señor*."

"And the news?"

"Good, *señor*; he lives. He will get well and strong to command us."

There was a gleam of pleasure in the eyes of the two sentries as Jack spoke, while they watched him beat upon the door and enter.

"A fine officer; one of the English!" exclaimed the Spaniard, who seemed to be on the best of terms with the Portuguese guerrilla, a strange occurrence in those days. "If the worst were to come to the worst——"

"Yes," responded the other, in a patois both could understand, "yes, he would command. But it would not be the same; the *Señor* Tom is one man, the *Señor* Jack another."

Inside stood the faithful Andrews and Howeley, drawn stiffly to attention, saluting their officer. Jack's serious face brightened.

"Well?" he demanded again, as if he were short of words.

"Better, sir, beggin' pardon," came from Andrews, with his accustomed formula demanding pardon. "Surgeon's been and gone; says as Mr. Clifford's as hard as rocks, and if he wasn't he'd have been trampled and banged to pieces. Swears as he must have fust of all been blowed skyhigh, and then charged over by a thousand of the stormers. He's

takin' notice of things, sir, is Mr. Clifford. Axing fer the regiment, and you. He'd have been out of bed if I hadn't prevented him—and, my word, he were a handful!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Jack, a grin rising on his solemn features. "A handful! Tom's that all the time. Wanted to get up, eh?"

"Yes, sir," grunted the rifleman, still stiffly at attention. 'Not you, sir,' I says; 'you're as weak as a kitten.' 'Rot!' he whispers, 'cos he can't speak no higher. 'I've got work, Andrews.' 'So has we all,' I answers. 'Orders is orders, sir.' 'Eh?' he asks, sharp-like, as you know, sir. 'Orders that you're to stay abed, sir,' I says, not half-liking things. 'Orders be hanged,' he tries to shout, struggling to get up, and then falling back on the pillow.'"

"Like him," smiled Jack. Anyway he's safe now, eh?"

If it were a question of our hero's security from interference, then there was little doubt; for beside those two sentries parading outside the courtyard of the house in which he lay, there were a dozen more at different points, with Andrews and Howeley to supervise them. Nor were such precautions to be wondered at when the tale of the last few hours was told. Tom had not only passed through the dangers of a siege. True, he had escaped the ordeal at the breaches, and had been borne still breathing into the town. But there another danger had suddenly assailed him; for no sooner was he laid in bed,

and Jack had departed, than the watchful Andrews had discovered a sneaking form clambering in by one of the windows. Had Andrews been Septimus John Clifford's head clerk he would then and there have made a discovery of vast importance, and one which we will at once hand on to the reader. For this sneaking intruder, bearing a stiletto in one hand, was none other than José de Esteros, Tom's cousin, now sunk to the lowest depths of infamy, and forestalled just in the nick of time in the endeavour to carry out further villainy. He had made good his escape, and, as a result, Tom's little command now watched over their damaged leader.

The best of food, the most careful attention on the part of the army surgeon, and the tenderest nursing at the hands of Andrews and others were already having their effect, and so, for a while, we may leave our hero, satisfied that he will bob up again in the future and encounter more adventures in this memorable campaign.

Let us then step outside the walls of Badajoz, walls conquered at huge sacrifice by the British, and after the most gallant fighting. For it will already have been gathered that this Peninsula campaign was full of incidents, all of which the space at our disposal prevents our mentioning. In the circumstances it will be readily understood that with troops operating here and there over a wide stretch of country there were numerous affairs, some mere skirmishes, some approaching a big engagement,

which, while they each and every one undoubtedly helped on the end at which our leaders aimed, and are with equal certainty recorded in official histories, yet for the purposes of this narrative are of small account.

Beginning in 1808, as already recorded, this memorable campaign had at first seen a succession of commanders sent by the vacillating Ministry in England, and of these the great Wellington alone remained, having proved his right to lead our armies. Those momentous months since the opening of the campaign had witnessed, as the reader will remember, the dismissal of the French from Portugal and the advance of our armies into Spain. The tragedy of Sir John Moore's retreat over the border had followed; and we have seen Wellington forced backward in Portugal itself, till the enemy held the country right down to the formidable heights of Torres Vedras. And then had come the turn of the tide. The vast masses of men controlled by Napoleon had been sent to the rightabout, and here, in the eventful year 1812, we find Portugal once more swept clean of the enemy, and the important fortesses of Ciudad Rodrigo and of Badajoz in the hands of the British. The tide had turned, we say, and, like the energetic and astute leader he was, the great Wellington at once proceeded to follow up these successes, and to push on into the heart of Spain, with the one object of forcing the enemy finally to quit the Peninsula.

But no narrative of the events which had already

happened would be complete without mention of a force, subtle enough and slow to be seen at first, which was now steadily aiding the efforts of our soldiers. Despite the criminal neglect of our ambassador in Madrid, despite, too, the wicked opposition and folly of the Spanish Junta in particular, and in smaller measure of the Portuguese Junta, both of which bodies had persistently opposed each and every aim of the British, our armies had fought and won. Often enough the gallant, thin red line had been basely left by the fleeing troops of Portugal and Spain to face the onslaught of Napoleon's trained battalions. And yet that thin red line of gallant souls had conquered. Their persistence, their cheerful bravery in the face of enormous odds, and their bull-dog, strenuous fighting had told its tale on the masses of the enemy. Scepticism as to their worth as soldiers, a scepticism natural, perhaps, to troops highly trained, and till then victorious in all directions, had been changed to hearty respect, if not to actual fear. That feeling of respect engendering fear and caution alone was the subtle force now aiding our armies. Each man, whether officer or private, had the utmost confidence in his leaders and in his comrades; while the French, bearing the late prowess of the British in mind, wondered whether success were now as certain as they had imagined. Who knows? The persistent advance of our armies, the skill of our leaders, and the bull-dog courage of our men may well have had their effect upon the

great Napoleon himself. Accustomed to see his arms successful in every venture, he found in the British a foe who knew no defeat, and who pressed him always. For the Portuguese this restless Emperor may have had some respect; for the Spanish he had only hatred, since their determination not to accept his brother as their king, and their incessant rioting and attacks upon his soldiers had caused him trouble and anxiety. Now there were the British to deal with. British opposition had wrested Portugal from the all-conquering Emperor of France. She was now thrusting her way into the heart of Andalusia. That meant further strenuous fighting, and if past records were to be repeated, it meant further British victories, in spite of the mass of Napoleon's armies. Who knows, then, we suggest, that this fear may have weighed with the restless Emperor of the French, with the ambitious and avaricious little corporal? To be balked in his wishes was with him ever, as with all such men, galling in the extreme. Here, in the Peninsula, our coming and our intervention had resulted in tremendous efforts on the part of Napoleon, efforts set aside by Wellington's armies. And now the tide had turned. What wonder if Napoleon, realizing that here he was on the verge of a defeat, turned his eyes to other conquests? Whatever the cause, Russia now attracted the attention of the Emperor. He had ridden posthaste for Paris. France, groaning already beneath the weight of taxation necessary to maintain such huge armies in the field, was being bled still

further, both in money and men, to provide another army of conquest. Troops were already massing on the borders of Russia, and soon was to arrive that calamity which will always hold a prominent place in the histories of the world. For Napoleon was marching to defeat. The plains of Russia were to see his armies swept almost out of existence, while the crops now ripening at the beginning of summer, a summer which Wellington in Spain had determined to make the greatest use of, were to flare up before Napoleon's troops could lay their hungry hands on them. Moscow, the city of promise, the magnet drawing the ambitious and reckless Emperor to destruction, was to burn before his eyes, and thereafter snow and frost and desperate hunger were to fight his armies silently, while Cossacks in their thousands hung like a swarm of flies about the flanks, slaughtering the helpless.

But we are forestalling events. Napoleon had left the Peninsula for other and, as he imagined no doubt, easier conquests, leaving his generals in Spain the difficult task of driving out a British army which, with few exceptions, had proved itself absolutely invincible.

Portugal was entirely in the hands of the British. Spain was beckoning strongly. Wellington, gathering his faithful and war-worn troops about him, was about to plunge into the heart of Andalusia, and, quitting the siege of fortresses, was eager to try conclusions with the enemy in the open. But he was

ever a careful man, and as a preliminary to invasion and attack upon the Duke of Ragusa he planned the destruction of the bridge erected at Almarez, spanning the Tagus, and protected by forts immensely strengthened by the French. Here were known to be collected huge stores of ammunition, while the bridge itself served as a means of communication between one French army and another. With the crossing destroyed, Wellington might hope to throw himself upon the enemy with good chance of success; for by keeping the various forces of the enemy apart he might reasonably expect to beat them in detail, victory against the vast masses of French when combined being out of the question. Thus Almarez and the bridge spanning the historic Tagus now attracted his attention, as well as the formidable forts erected to protect the same.

Let us describe in a few words the condition of the surrounding country. From Almarez itself to the city of Toledo the left bank of the River Tagus is hemmed in by a range of steep mountains. From Almarez again to the Portuguese frontier, roads in those days were almost non-existent, and the crossing in any case most difficult; while farther east the bridges at Arzobispo and Talavera were covered by the neighbouring high ground.

The River Tagus itself separated the armies of Soult and of Marmont, and, seeing that Soult's pontoon train had been captured in Badajoz, there was left no other means of communicaton between the

armies than the bridge of boats at Almarez, which the critical eye of Wellington had already selected for destruction. But, as we have hinted, there were difficulties in the way; for in view of the importance of the place, and of the mass of stores of one sort or another concentrated there, the French had made every preparation to protect the bridge. A fort had been erected on the north bank, another at the opposite end of the bridge, while the heights immediately adjacent on the latter side had been connected by a chain of works which a casual inspection would have said defied assault. Yet Wellington considered that Sir Rowland Hill, in command of a force 6000 strong, would contrive to overcome all difficulties, and that gallant officer promptly marched from the camp which the British had now formed, for since the fall of Badajoz our forces had marched north to the Tagus, and had crossed the river. A small expeditionary arm was therefore within striking distance of the all-important crossing at Almarez. Secrecy, as in the case of the descents on Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz, was essential in this adventure, and Sir Rowland, therefore, marched at night-time, secreting his whole force in the wood of Jarciejo during the day, this wood being in the immediate neighbourhood of the enemy. Then his men were divided into three columns, and in the early hours, while darkness yet hid the land, they set out upon an expedition destined to prove amongst the most brilliant of any recorded during this long campaign in the Peninsula. For the plans of generals,

like those of other more humble individuals perhaps, are destined at times to be overthrown, and here was an example. That secrecy at which Sir Rowland Hill aimed was destroyed by a combination of circumstances, so that the garrisons of the forts about to be attacked became aware of his intentions. Yet the work was done, and done brilliantly, though only at a heavy sacrifice. The forts were taken, the bridge secured, while the losses of the enemy were very heavy. Then, expedition being an essential point, mines were laid, and the works, or a portion of them, destroyed. When Sir Rowland returned to Wellington's camp he was able to report the success of the expedition, while Wellington himself was now able seriously to consider the question of an attack upon the enemy in the open; for the first step toward that effort had been taken. Easy communication between the enemy was destroyed, and now had come the opportunity to seek out and beat in detail the armies of Napoleon.

Forward, then, was the order, and 21st July, 1812, found Wellington and his army north of the Tagus, close to Salamanca and to the Rivers Tormes and Huebra, having meanwhile cleared the intervening country and besieged the Salamanca forts. Marmont, with his French battalions, now lay before him; for they had crossed the river between Huerta and Tormes, and were endeavouring to secure the road to Ciudad Rodrigo. However, if Wellington, as a clever tactician, as he undoubtedly was, had as his

object the division of the enemy's forces, with a view of beating them in detail, Marmont also was not unskilful. Remembering the comparative paucity of the British troops, and the fact that they had, as it were, burned their boats behind them, he hoped to throw his troops between our regiments and the fortress of Ciudad Rodrigo, then garrisoned by British, thus not only cutting communication between Wellington and the fortress, but also drawing a line of fire and steel between the British and Portugal, to which country they would naturally retreat in case of defeat or in the event of huge odds being concentrated against them.

Thus, having brought our gallant fellows face to face with an equally gallant enemy in the open, and having reviewed the movements of this difficult and complex campaign, we can leave the two rival armies in position for battle, and can once more seek out Tom Clifford, commander of the composite force of Portuguese and Spanish guerrillas, which, amidst a host of irregular British allies—some good, some indifferent, and some altogether useless and even dangerous—had already earned a name for energy and a patriotic spirit worthy of emulation amongst many chicken-hearted countrymen. Back, then, to Badajoz, let us retrace our steps, and, accepting the salutes of the Spanish and Portuguese sentries—smart fellows both—hammer on the door of the courtyard and enter, there to be greeted by the faithful Howeley and Andrews.

Some weeks had passed since Tom had joined the forlorn hope, and had been blown like a stone down the steep scarp of the breach effected by our gunners. He sat in an armchair, his feet on a stool, Jack Barwood discussing matters with him, and at the same time smoking a pipe which he had secured in the dwelling.

"Of course," Tom was saying in his business-like way, "orders are orders. But——"

"They're a beastly nuisance for all that. Granted," was Jack's interruption. "Well?"

"And, equally of course, must be obeyed. 'Pon my word, Jack, you seem to be as keen as I am on this quest. What's it to do with you, anyway?"

"Nothing; everything." Jack took a heavy pull at his pipe, choked suddenly, and then glared at the pipe as if it had done him a mischief.

"Awful country," he grumbled. "Decent food ungetable, decent beds unknown. Tobacco—ugh! it'd sicken a Billingsgate porter! But this business interests me. Why? you ask. Here's why. Fair play is a thing I like; foul play gets up my dander. Of course I know the whole story now. This cousin chap first took food and lodging from your father and pretended gratitude; then he managed to work things so as to have you impressed. There I owe him a grudge; for if he hadn't, where should I be, eh?"

"Eh?" repeated Tom, a little puzzled.

"That's just it," went on the ensign in an aggrieved

tone of voice. "Who'd have had the command of those French troopers? Who'd have brought them through that mess? Who'd now be promoted to the command of a regiment of guerrillas?"

He might have been the most injured of individuals, to look at him. Jack rose to his feet and bashed the offending pipe heavily on a table. And then he grinned at Tom.

"My uncle!" he exclaimed; "you are a flat! Yes, even if you are my superior, I can call you that. Took everything I said as if it were meant seriously. Where should I have been, eh? Dead, Tom—dead as a bullock. Shot outside that Portuguese church, and cut to mincemeat by those rascals. But this business of yours interests me solely because you happen to be a pal of mine, and in my opinion very much injured. This José is a scoundrel. What's more, I believe him to be at the bottom of all these troubles. He's that spy, sir, I declare! He's the very same scoundrel who crept in here with the idea of doing you a mortal mischief. There, think it out, and don't wonder if I am a little interested in this curious and blackguardly mystery."

Could this really be the case? Was José de Esteros not only the rascal who had caused Tom's impressment, as we know, and Tom and his friends now knew, to be the case; but also, was he the treacherous ruffian who had been feeding the enemy with news of Wellington's movements, whose messenger our hero had displaced outside Ciudad Rod-

rigo? Could Tom's cousin be the selfsame villain who had abducted his father and uncle, and who later on had endeavoured to creep into this house in Badajoz and murder the gallant officer so nearly killed in the storming?

"Humbug!" Tom declared, nursing the arm which he had worn in a sling since receiving his injuries. "I grant that José was the cause of my impressment. There I owe him a grudge, Jack."

"Eh?" asked the adjutant, stoking his pipe with a finger and pulling at it vainly. "How?"

"Been troubled with a certain Jack Barwood ever since," came the serious answer. And then Tom went off into roars of laughter, while Jack pretended indignation.

"Granted that José was the cause of that portion," Tom continued. "We know he came to Oporto; there we lose sight of him. The spy comes on the scene. Granted here, again, that he it was who abducted my father and uncle, for the note left was in the same handwriting as that other we secured outside Ciudad Rodrigo; but that doesn't say that José was the spy, even if you argue that he has reasons for wishing to abduct my two relatives. Now, does it?"

"But the handwriting? It's like his; you forget that."

"I don't; I agree that, from what I can remember of it, there is a similarity. But I'm not by any means sure; besides, José couldn't be such a rascal."

Jack's reply was as emphatic as many others. "Stuff and nonsense!" he blurted out. "A man who tries to get rid of a cousin with whom he has lived all his life, as this fellow did, will take on any piece of rascality. Look at his actions on arrival at Oporto, and think of his cunning. My boy, this José's at the bottom of the whole matter, so keep your eye open."

How Tom was to keep his eye open his adjutant failed to explain, nor was there any further evidence to convict José of this added piece of rascality. Tom was still in ignorance of the personality of the spy whom he had traced to Oporto, and thence to Badajoz. He knew that the man was responsible for the abduction of Septimus and Don Juan de Esteros. But was José the spy? Was the spy the man who had crept into these quarters in Badajoz with the obvious intention of slaying Tom, and, if so, what was his object?

"It's José all the time," declared Jack, cocksure of the fact.

"Doubtful," repeated Tom, still refusing to believe his cousin capable of such villainy. "But leave it at that. The fellow's gone, and taken with him his two captives; the next thing to do is to follow."

"Wrong; the next move is to obey orders."

Jack had become a very useful adjutant by now, and showed his promptness by handing Tom the orders which lay upon the table. Our hero almost ground his teeth as he read them; for there, in black

and white, were definite commands for the regiment to march for the Tagus, and there join hands with Wellington's army. Never, in fact, had orders been worse received. Hitherto Tom had been the first to welcome them; now they came between him and private business.

"But duty first," he told himself. "We'll march before the week's out, for those are the instructions. Meanwhile we've at least heard something. Read the report again," he said, signing to his friend.

Jack picked up a paper, and promptly obliged him. "Here we are," he said. "Alfonso reports that following orders he has continued to patrol the surroundings of the fortress. A covered carriage was driven out just before dusk last evening. It was stopped and found to be empty. The driver stated he was going to a country place to fetch in an invalid. Later, when the carriage was well beyond our circle, it stopped beside a convoy of carts going from the fortress. Sharp questioning of the man in charge brought the admission that men were hidden among the contents of the carts, two of whom were bound and gagged. They were placed in the carriage, which was instantly driven away down the road, and when our men arrived was out of hearing. Though they searched, it was in vain. The scoundrel had got away with his captives."

"And then?" asked Tom, listening without sign of emotion.

"Close enquiries here discovered the fact that a

carriage had been hired to take a gentleman to Madrid. That's all."

That indeed was all the information that our hero or his friends had been able to come by. The strenuous efforts and the danger which Tom had incurred in endeavouring to make an early entry into Badajoz had resulted in nothing. The miscreant who gave information to the enemy had slipped out with his captives, and there were our heroes none the nearer to success. They were farther off, in fact, for there, on the table, were orders taking them north to the Tagus, while it seemed likely enough that Tom's father and uncle had been hurried east to Madrid, where search for them, if ever the opportunity came, would be long and difficult.

"Can't be helped. When orders allow, we'll make a rush for the city," said Tom. "Meanwhile, it's off to the Tagus!"

"To join the army again—hooray!" shouted Jack. "That means a big general engagement; it means fighting, my boy! Perhaps it'll give us both promotion."

Hard knocks, wounds, and exposure were more likely to be their portion. But what did these two young officers care? What would other officers of a similar age in these days care? Nothing. Rather they were elated at the prospect of taking a share in a pitched battle, and had not so much as a qualm when at length they reached the neighbourhood of Salamanca. As for their men, confident now of their

ability to fight, proud of what they had already done, they marched to their allotted quarters in the camp with a tramp and a swing that commanded attention.

"General Lord Wellington's compliments," began a staff officer, galloping up just as Tom had inspected his men, and had called upon Jack to dismiss the parade. "Are you Lieutenant Clifford?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then have the goodness to ride over to headquarters at once; his lordship desires to see you."

"Hooray!" cried Jack, careless of decorum, hurrying up at the moment. "That'll mean business, my boy. The general's got a special job for our guerrillas."

And Wellington had. When Tom had been ushered into the tent which housed the leader of the British army he found that painstaking individual seated on a camp stool carefully measuring distances on a map stretched on a table before him. Tom stood stiffly at attention, and though the staff officer who ushered him twice called his name, there was no answer. Then suddenly a point of the compasses was struck into the map and an exclamation escaped the general.

"If he moves there, we have him," he cried. "Then all depends on the Spaniards. Ah!" He shut the map hurriedly, and looked at Tom as if he thought him to be a suspicious person. Then, recognizing him, he smiled.

"The officer the French will not fight," he said cheerfully. "The Englishman they did their best to destroy in the breaches at Badajoz. You are recovered, sir?"

"Perfectly," Tom hastened to assure him, fearful that a fancied weakness might cause the general to choose another officer for any special work he might have in prospect.

"And will accept a special risk?"

Tom drew himself up stiffly. With anyone else there would have been a note of injury in the answer; for had he shirked special risk in the past? Ciudad Rodrigo was a telling answer to such a question. And Wellington realized the fact as soon as he had spoken.

"I take it for granted that you are more than ready," he said. "Good! Then the mission I have is somewhat similar to that other. You saw me close this plan hurriedly? I did it unknowingly, impelled by the fear that you might be a stranger; for here is my story. Maps and plans jealously guarded by us have disappeared, my dispatch case has been broken open. My officers have information that there is a small gang of rascals who trade on our secrets. I want to bring that gang to book, if it exists. Now, Mr. Clifford, once more I make no suggestions, and give no orders. You will act as you think best. After to-morrow you are free to carry out whatever seems best to you. Remember, after to-morrow."

That was all. Tom found himself outside the tent, still saluting.

"A pretty job to unravel," he told himself. "And what's on to-morrow?"

Yes, what was to happen when the day broke once more across the smooth surface of the River Tormes?

There was to be war, real war, war in the open, the like of which Tom had never before witnessed.

CHAPTER XVI

The Battle of Salamanca

THE gentle tinkle of convent bells, the lowing of distant oxen, and the cheery whistling and singing of the men of Wellington's 1st Division awakened Tom on the morrow of his arrival in the neighbourhood of Salamanca. He shook off his blanket and rose, stretching himself, then inhaled the balmy summer air, and enjoyed the hazy view over the heights of the Arapiles, a precipitous part adjacent to the city, and split into two portions, known as the Sister Arapiles.

A thousand bivouac fires were smoking, a thousand and more busy cooks struggled to prepare the rations for the day, while soldiers came and went carrying ammunition, food, fodder, and water, or leading long, roped lines of horses up from the river.

What a bustle there was about the camp, what order and method, and what cheerfulness. A band was playing over by the headquarters tent, above which flew General Lord Wellington's flag. A battery of guns went trundling by, the men in their shirt sleeves, for they were merely taking up another position, and the business of the day had not begun.

And yonder were the enemy, some 42,000 strong,

with 74 guns, with cavalry and every branch which goes to the completion of an army. Already these thousands were astir; the French bivouac fires had been stamped out, and the morning meal eaten. There came the blare of trumpets across the breeze, drowning the peaceful tinkle of the convent bells and the pleasant lowing of cattle. Drums rattled away in the far distance, while dust began to rise over road and plain, as the battalions of the enemy marched hither and thither to take up their posts for the coming conflict. For a battle was imminent. Wellington with much patience and forethought had prepared the way for it. He had cleared Portugal of the foreign invader. He had captured Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz, but at what cost and suffering! That last manœuvre had wrecked the bridge at Almarez, and had destroyed the huge stores collected there by the enemy. But now he was face to face with one of their armies, Marmont's, the Duke of Ragusa, and was eager to try his strength with them, while they, to do them justice, were just as ready.

"Mr. Clifford, commanding the composite regiment of Portuguese and Spanish irregulars?"

The staff officer reined in his mount at Tom's feet and saluted.

"Here, sir."

"You will see that your men draw rations, and take their water bottles filled, also ammunition; then march for General Pack's brigade and report to him,

They are over there; you can see the dark uniforms."

He galloped away without waiting for Tom to reply, and they saw him racing across to headquarters. Other aides-de-camp were cantering from that same place, and in a little while bugles and drums were sounding amidst the British lines, while men were falling in by regiments.

"Parade present and correct, sir," reported Jack, riding up as Tom clambered into his saddle.

"Keep them as they are then, Mr. Barwood," came Tom's most polite answer; for on duty there was no joking between these two young officers. "I'll say a few words to them first, before we move off. We've to join General Pack's Portuguese brigade, so our fellows will be fighting alongside their countrymen to-day."

"Yes, sir; and they'll show 'em the way."

"And cover themselves with credit. They look well," reflected Tom, as the two rode on to the ground in front of their little corps, and drew rein some few paces from them. "Smart; no doubt about it. Don't see a sign of funking."

"No, sir. Shall I call up the other officer and our non-coms?"

"Please, and quickly with it."

Alfonso halted before our hero, his face brimming over with enthusiasm. He saluted, and waited. Then came Andrews and Howeley, both old soldiers; for there was none of your short service then. The

men of the British army, whether recruits or old stagers, filled their breeches and jackets, and gave good measure round calf and thigh and chest. The two riflemen were fine specimens of the 60th, and, being detached from their corps, seemed to hold themselves all the better, as if to let all and sundry see what a rifle regiment could do for its members.

"We join Pack's brigade," explained Tom. "They're posted about the centre and are likely to be in the thick of it. I want you all to remember that this corps must set an example. We must hold the men together. If others of the irregulars bolt before the enemy, we won't have the same said of our fellows. Now, men," he called out. "A word before we march. There's the enemy before you, yonder is General Pack's brigade of Portuguese. We go to join them; let every man remember how this corps has behaved in the past. Hold firmly together and keep your wits about you. Your courage I know you will hold, for that you have proved already. For the rest, keep your eyes on your officers, and recollect that when the press comes, if come it does, you are fighting for home and country."

A British regiment would have cheered the strangely youthful-looking staff officer. The mixed guerrillas from the hilltops of Spain and Portugal stared at him hard. There was a set expression on every bronzed face, a hard gripping of muskets, and a swinging of all eyes over to the enemy. And then came the word to march. They stepped out briskly. Heads erect,

muskets at the trail, their commander leading them, the little corps advanced to take its part for the first time in a general action. Nor did its smartness pass unobserved.

"What corps is that?" demanded the great Wellington, ever observant, his eyes in all directions. "All dressed in blue, I think, and—yes, some wearing the red cockade of Spain. What corps, please?"

"Mr. Clifford's, sir; recruited on the borders, and composed of 300 Portuguese and as many Spanish hillmen. The only corps where the two nationalities have worked in friendship with one another. They were in that Ciudad Rodrigo affair, sir; also down at Badajoz."

The spyglass flew to the general's eye, and for a while he watched the corps striding along. Then he eyed the young commander.

"Good!" he exclaimed, thinking aloud. "They march like veterans. Their officer conducts himself like a tried general. There's no hurry about him, but slap-dash-up smartness. If they fight as they march we've something to boast of. And with such an officer my little mission is likely to receive attention."

He shut the glass with a bang and went cantering off towards the heights of the Sister Arapiles, a brilliant staff trailing out behind him. As for Tom, he held on his way without swerving. Now passing between halted regiments, now halting his own command to allow of the passage of a battery or more

of guns, which went by at a trot, obliterating all about them in the clouds of dust tossed up by the wheels and the hoofs of the horses. Meanwhile the sun flashed in the distance from a forest of French bayonets, manœuvring for position, marching this way or that, while a little later a battery took post away on the shoulder of one of the sister heights, smoke billowed from unseen muzzles, while shot tore through the summer air, and came bounding and ricochetting towards them.

"Report, sir; General Wellington's orders," said Tom, halting his little corps to the front of Pack's brigade and reporting to that officer.

"Ah! Reinforcements or reserve!" came the answer, while the gallant general smiled a welcome. "Smart men yours, sir. Name, may I ask, please?"

"Clifford, sir, General Lord Wellington's staff, seconded for service with irregulars."

And then the smile on the general's face broadened. He gripped Tom's hand warmly. "Ah! The twins, I know," he cried gaily. "The officer the French refuse to fight, eh?"

Tom, with heightened colour, was forced to confess that it was so. Then he cast his eyes along the sitting lines of the Portuguese brigade, garbed in its blue, and wondered how these rough levies would conduct themselves. A moment later he was sitting erect to receive his orders.

"March your command to our left, and fall in in rear, to act as a reserve with the companies already

detailed for that service. Smart men, Mr. Clifford, a smart lot of fellows!"

There were thousands of others in Pack's brigade who repeated that opinion; for, seeing that Tom's men were standing while the remainder of the brigade were sitting, they were the observed of all observers.

"Halt! Dress on the right—smartly does it," came from Tom.

"Smartly does it!" Jack roared in the stentorian voice becoming to an adjutant, and—we must confess it—with an accent which brought a whimsical smile to General Pack's face.

"Lively with it, boys!" shouted Howeley and Andrews together, using a language half English, a little Portuguese, and the rest nothing in particular. "Lively does it! Dress up there on the left. 'Shun! Stand at ease! Back there that swab away on the left."

Rigidly erect, the toes of their English-made boots forming a line which would have drawn a note of approval even from the lips of a liverish martinet, Tom's men stood at attention, muskets at the shoulder, bayonets already fixed. And then, with a clatter, they sat down, having piled their weapons.

"Two hours since we left camp; perhaps we'd better give 'em some grub," suggested Jack, peeping into his own haversack. For whatever may have been the duties of this ensign, he was still just the overgrown boy, always hungry, always ready for a meal.

"Always growing, that's the reason," he had often

explained. "Must have something at hand to build up an increasing framework."

How those two hours had changed the July morning! The sun swam redly overhead, approaching the vertical position; a few fine clouds flecked the sky; while the heights, the distant cork forest sheltering the French battalions, still looked peaceful enough. But there was the roar of guns in many directions. Away behind Pack's brigade, posted on an eminence, and sheltered by the straggling buildings of a farm, was a British battery, busily pumping shot over the heads of the sitting brigade at an enemy then invisible to Tom and his comrades. The answering shot likewise shrieked above the brigade, and more than once Jack pointed, while men scrambled to their feet and looked about them as if terrified.

"Don't look well for later on," he jerked out crisply. "But you never know. Anyway, the bulk of them are taking matters coolly."

No wonder the peace of the land about Salamanca was disturbed; for to match the masses of the enemy Wellington had collected some 40,000 men, including 3500 cavalry and 54 guns. These he had on this eventful day beneath his eye, cut up into divisions, and so placed that he could move his forces rapidly. His right rested on the foothills of the Sister Arapiles, as yet unoccupied by our men, but at that moment being scaled by the French legions. His left extended to the River Tormes, while he himself passed this way and that, eagerly watching the move-

ments of the enemy. Marmont was even more busy than Wellington, and there is little doubt but that he hoped by this general action to smash the power of the commander who was now such a thorn in his side, and to cut him off from Portugal completely. His right manœuvred persistently for the road to Ciudad Rodrigo, while his left marched on the Arapiles, and now occupied one of the heights. For the rest, his centre was masked by a cork wood, through the gaps in which came the reflections from the flashing bayonets of his battalions.

A burst of firing echoed across the plain from the village of Arapiles, now occupied by our infantry. Flying figures were seen struggling down the heights and forming up at their base. Shot plunged over the heads of Pack's sitting brigade and smote those descending ranks. And then came the rattle of drums, the cheers of frantic men, a red flash as muskets were exploded, followed by the pitter-pat of independent firing. Crash! Bang! Those guns behind the farm pounded the advancing French, ploughing the ground about them. The cheers broke out even louder, and were drowned by a torrent of musketry which flashed round the post held by British infantry.

The same scene, diversified a little, was happening away on our left, where our battalions manœuvred against Marmont's, holding them back from that all-important road. Elsewhere, when not actively engaged, or making some countering move, troops sat down in their formation, men nibbled at their rations,

while a squadron of horse slowly cantered across a dusty part, into which the enemy's cannon ball plumped in quick succession. Tom found himself actually feeling drowsy, Jack Barwood looked as if he could willingly drop off to sleep, while some of the regiment were stretched full length, their eyes tight closed, not even bothering to open them when there came a clatter near at hand and a ball trundled and roared past them.

Down below those heights, to which we have referred so often, sat Wellington, wearied with long watching and counter manœuvring, dismounted now, his spyglass in his pocket, and himself seated at a midday meal, which he needed as much perhaps as any of his soldiers. For the moment he could do no more. He was merely watching and waiting. Thus he and his staff snatched a hasty meal, wondering what the result of the day was to be for them. Then came electrifying news—Marmont was extending his left. He was pushing his divisions up into the Arapiles, leaving his centre denuded, while right and left wings of his army were steadily getting farther and farther from one another. It was the moment for which Wellington had been waiting; it was the moment of all others in which to strike. That critical stage in the coming contest had arrived where one leader, in this case Marmont, attempts too great a task; while his opponent, watching him like a cat, sees the error, realizes the opportunity, and sends his men headlong to make the most of it.

There, in fact, as Wellington looked through his spyglass, were the divisions forming the French left separated from their centre; while, in addition to this attempted enveloping movement, Marmont was still manœuvring his right, so as to close the road to Ciudad Rodrigo. Here, in fact, if we look closely into the circumstances, was an example of divided force, that for which Wellington was ever seeking. His acuteness, and the strenuous fighting of his men, had separated Marmont from other French armies. Now Marmont's own dispositions had separated his left wing from its centre and right, and at this precise moment the opportunity had come to beat his army in detail.

Pakenham's 3rd Division was seated about our general. He had been lunching with its officers, Pakenham being his own brother-in-law. Instantly he gave this gallant leader orders, and at once the men of the 3rd Division were on their feet. Forward they charged against the left wing on the slope of the Sister Arapiles. Batteries thundered against them; muskets sent a stinging hail of bullets against the face of the charging division; while cavalry emerged from a fold in the ground and charged madly for the advancing British. But none could stay that gallant division. The men swept cavalry aside. They laughed at bullets and cannon shot. Leaving a thick trail of killed and wounded, they pressed the charge home, came to handgrips with the enemy, and then attacked them with the bayonet.

"Let them loose!" cried Pakenham; and at the command the Connaught Rangers, ever a fine fighting corps, was sent into the midst of the thick masses of Marmont's left wing.

"Magnificent but dreadful!" cried Tom, a witness from the plain of the whole scene. "Look; our fellows are crumpling the enemy's left wing up! Our colours are right alongside theirs, with the men fighting all round. It's a grand movement!"

"The Portuguese brigade will fall in!"

The command rang out over that portion of the ground where Tom and his men were stationed, and at once the men were on their feet.

"Dress up there on the right. Back in the centre. Nicely does it, men! Ready and correct, sir."

Jack Barwood, a grin of excitement on his face, rode up to Tom and reported the composite regiment to be ready.

"March!"

The brigade was in motion. Extending by battalions to left and right, its face was soon far wider than it had been. Pack led them direct to that Arapile height still held by Marmont, and known as Hermanito. Guns blazed and thundered at the Portuguese. Shot plunged through the ranks, sweeping men by half-dozens out of existence. Musket bullets began to sizzle and whip about the ears of the brigade, and fell even amongst the reserve marching some four hundred yards in rear. Tom's men

began to fall by the way. Was there a sign of flinching?

"Good plucked 'uns, to the backbone," muttered Jack, at Tom's side now, his face eager and tense. "Our boys will do well, sir. What are the orders?"

An aide-de-camp had just galloped round, and had shouted instructions to our hero.

"We're to charge up behind the men and support any part where the enemy are pressing," he said shortly. "I'm going to move off to the side a little; as we are we get all the shots and balls which miss the brigade in advance, and that isn't business. To the left there are folds in the ground which will give us shelter. Look away up there at Pakenham's 3rd Division."

The struggle was still progressing there, though the enemy's guns had ceased to thunder. Our scarlet-clad men could be seen mustering here and there, and, though Tom could not himself know what was happening, that mustering told its own tale. For Marmont's left wing, so recklessly moved away from the support of its centre and right, was conquered. Three thousand of the enemy were already prisoners, with two much-coveted eagles and eleven cannon. The rest were scattered, some still contesting the ground, while the remainder had taken to their heels. Indeed, all eyes were now on Pack's brigade.

"Charge! Up the hill and at them!"

The command rang out in Portuguese, and at once the irregulars stormed the height, their muskets at

the trail, their bayonets already fixed. Ah, they were close to the summit! Breathless with the climb, but eager for the conflict, they cheered as they gained the height. Then there came the roar and crackle of musketry. Twelve hundred French infantry emptied their muskets into the charging host and came at them with fixed bayonets—fresh men against men blown after a stiff climb. There was the crash and clank of crossing weapons, and, later, cries of terror. Dismayed by the enemy's charge, straggling as is the case with infantry after a stiff climb, the Portuguese in engagement with Marmont's men turned tail and fled down the hill, exposing the 4th Division on its flank to the attack of the enemy. Instantly French regiments poured up, guns crashed out, while a hail of musketry was sent against that division by the ranks of the French.

"Double!" commanded Tom, emerging with his men a few moments earlier from a convenient and merciful fold in the ground, and realizing instantly what had happened. "Double up there and cover the flank of the 4th Division. Now, halt!"

It took ten minutes perhaps to get into position, and all the while the enemy were advancing at a run to take the 4th Division in flank. But Tom's men were there before them, and, at his shrill whistles, at once broke up into squares of double companies, one Portuguese and one Spanish being now associated together in all manœuvres.

"Wait for the word to fire!" bellowed Tom, while

Jack, and Alfonso, and Andrews, and Howeley repeated the order in stentorian tones. "Fire by squares! Be ready to charge!"

Pandemonium reigned about them. A mass of cavalry swung of a sudden round the shoulder of the hill, and, skirting the French battalions, launched itself against Tom's devoted squares. Crash! Bang! A blaze of flame swept in their faces. Horses reared and fell with their riders. A thousand desperate troopers galloped at the squares, slashing and cutting. Crash! Bang! The muskets flashed redly; the bullets tore through the scattered ranks of the cavalry.

"Load! Stand ready there. Ah! Reserves are coming up. That must be the 5th Division. Men of the composite regiment, stand firm and you will have saved the position here. Ready? Then forward."

The three squares advanced steadily against the advancing French. Men fell here and there, but their places were instantly filled. The faces of the squares, presenting in this case but a narrowed angle to the enemy, swirled with fire and flame. Smoke hid the men from all observers, while a thunderous discharge came from their weapons. Then there followed the clink of ramrods. Bullets were driven home on powder and wads, primings were renewed, while flints were drawn back. Then again was repeated the same thunder of muskets, the same red flaming flash, the same vomiting of sulphurous

vapour. A minute later the 5th Division came panting up, and at once the enemy were pressed back. Steadily the advance was maintained, and presently the enemy were fleeing.

"Form line!" bellowed Tom, standing in his stirrups and waving his sword, all oblivious of the fact that a musket bullet had shattered the blade, leaving him with but six inches of steel clinging to the hilt. "Line up with the 4th Division. Forward!"

"Forward!" shrieked Jack in his terrible Portuguese.

"Now's the time, me boys!" shouted Andrews, ever encouraging the men.

On went the scarlet lines of British, with the thin blue line of Tom's irregulars wedged in between. Wellington himself came cantering up, for now had come the very crisis of the battle. The 6th Division doubled to the front with cheers of eagerness, while, away on the left of our line, troops until then hardly under fire went to the front.

Slowly at first, and then more swiftly, the enemy's regiments were crumpled up. Marmont had by now been severely wounded, while successive generals had been placed *hors de combat*. Muddled by counter orders, therefore, and no doubt scared by the dash of our battalions, the enemy retired all along the line, and was soon in retreat, protected by strong rearguards and followed persistently over miles of country by our men.

It would be impossible to detail every single combat

which followed. Gallant regiments on the side of the French stood fast, holding their ground while their comrades retired to safety. But as night fell all were in retirement, and here again were the plans of Lord Wellington upset by the very people who should have done their utmost to support him. For Marmont's army of the north was beaten. Capture of the survivors of this day's memorable fight would mean a French disaster, and to bring that about Wellington had long ago sent his Spanish irregulars to guard the fords across the River Tormes. Can we wonder that that at Alba was deserted by the cowardly Spanish as the French came near? And thereby a decisive defeat was lessened. By the next day, in fact, the French were across the river.

But Salamanca was won. The northern frontier of Portugal was freed of the enemy, and now, when we advanced into Spain still farther, we had this to content us—there were none of the enemy in rear to cut our communications or to stampede our rear-guards. They were to our front, and no Britisher fears an enemy whom he can see plainly.

But there were still rascals and traitors to be dealt with, as Tom was yet to learn. Not that he gave a thought to them. For on the evening of the battle, receiving an order from a galloping aide-de-camp, he halted his men and set them down for a breather. Then the sound of clattering hoofs came to his ears, and there rode out of the gathering gloom Lord Wellington himself, with a brilliant staff about him.

He drew rein within ten feet of the corps, now dishevelled and lessened sadly in numbers, but erect as ever, and dressed with that precision for which they had become notorious.

"What corps?" asked Wellington, though he needed no information.

"Lieutenant Clifford's, sir. Composite corps; half-Portuguese and half-Spanish."

Tom's heart thudded as the general set his horse three paces forward.

"Ah," he heard him say, "I felt sure it was they! Mr. Clifford."

"Sir," answered Tom, lowering the hilt of his broken sword.

"Mr. Barwood and the other officers, commissioned and non-commissioned," cried the general softly, causing all those individuals to come to the front.

"Gentlemen," said Wellington, his tones not raised in the slightest, as if he were discussing a matter of little interest, and yet conveying by a subtle inflection of his voice that it was no ordinary matter, "from the plain below we saw Pack's Portuguese turn tail and bolt. We saw the 4th Division heavily assailed. And then this corps was thrust into the gap. It was a brilliantly-conceived movement, and it helped to save a situation which was critical. The forming of the corps into squares was beyond all criticism. Mr. Clifford, you will be good enough to give my personal commendations to your men, whose bravery is a pattern for all their fellows.

Inform them that I hold them in great respect, and that since the respect of a commander is shown through his officers, who have done so well again, those officers' names will be sent to England in my dispatches. March your men back to their camp, please."

Did the men of Tom's corps cheer? They shouted themselves hoarse after our hero had spoken to them. They trudged across the field strewn with killed and wounded with merry songs, and turned into their blankets when all was over as proud as any in Spain or Portugal.

As for Tom, he was too fatigued to even think. Once his wounded were collected and his dead buried, a gruesome job for any commander, he dropped dead asleep in his blanket. He recked not of the work before him. His slumbering mind cared not a jot for the dangers of the task which his commander had given him. If there had been fifty spies to capture, if there had been fifty mysteries hanging about the persons of the rascal José and Tom's two relatives abducted from Oporto, that young fellow would still have slept. For he had fought his first big engagement. He had done strenuous work, and nature called aloud for repose for both body and brain before he took up other responsibilities. Till the morrow, then, we leave him till the rising sun awaked in his thoughts the memory of those urgent orders.

CHAPTER XVII

A Clue at Last

THOSE 40,000 victorious men of Wellington's great army now had their backs to the Portuguese frontier and were marching gaily on Madrid. Away in front a half-battalion of infantry watched for the French and found no trace of them. The guard in rear had an easy time of it, for attack was not to be feared from that quarter; while the cavalry patrols on either flank reported a country clear of all but peasants. As for the road itself, it was littered with carts of every description, not the motor lorries which to-day have achieved a triumph, making light of the task of hauling the stores and impedimenta of an army, but with mule carts in endless array, and four-wheeled and two-wheeled vehicles with their teams of mules and their gaudily-hatted drivers.

"Of all the aggravating, lazy beggars these are the worst I ever set eyes on," growled Jack Barwood, in command now of Tom's composite corps of Portuguese and Spanish; for that young fellow himself, together with Alfonso his cousin, had departed on special service. And didn't the great Jack give himself airs! Riding at the head of the corps he looked

about him as does a conqueror. And these muleteers came in for his displeasure.

"Straggling all over the road as usual. How's one to pass here?" he demanded of Andrews, who was marching beside him, and pointing to a batch of vehicles wedged in a rocky part of the road where a detour was almost impossible.

"Move 'em, sir," came the answer, while the rifleman suppressed a grin of amusement. Jack was a favourite with them all, but he sometimes excited their ridicule. He was different from the steady and yet dashing Tom.

"Move 'em, sir, or interview one of these blackguards conducting the caravan. Look at the beggar nearest; stares at us as if we hadn't a right on the road, when we all know we're here to fight the Spaniards' own battles. Precious fine help they give us too! The only time they're out of the way is when fightin's wanted. Hi, you, you son of a gun, move along with you!"

The individual in question, a beetle-browed young fellow, whose head was closely swathed in a brilliantly-red handkerchief, and who dangled his sombrero from one hand, squatted on the shaft of the nearest waiting cart, puffing a cigarette and staring with insolent eyes at the commander of the irregulars.

"Cheek!" exclaimed Jack. "The beggar looks at us as if we were trespassers. Haul him up, Andrews; we'll give him trespassers."

Jack sought in the back of his mind for all the

Spanish he knew and burst into an ungrammatical tirade when the muleteer was brought forward by Andrews.

"Hi, you!" said Jack haughtily; "hook it, double quick! You're keeping the duke's own corps of irregulars. Sheer out with your bothering carts or it'll be the worse for you."

That was the substance of his speech, a speech that brought a supercilious grin from the young man.

"*Si, señor,*" he said, "but there is time; there is always time."

Jack gripped his meaning with difficulty, and then bubbled over with wrath. Had he commanded cavalry he would have been tempted to ride over the insolent fellow and his obstruction. As it was, he felt he could thrash the man with his whip. But such action was out of the question. Jack fumed and raged, while Andrews grinned secretly. As for the Spaniard, he returned to his cart, finished his cigarette, and then gave the order for the group of vehicles to move forward. But as soon as the corps of irregulars had passed he sent a messenger to call its commander.

"Well?" demanded Jack haughtily, riding back, and meeting the man alone and well away from all others. "What fool's errand have you called me for?"

"Gently does it, Jack. Gently! I'll be frightened," laughed the muleteer, in the purest English. "How are things going?"

The young leader of the composite corps nearly dropped from his horse, and then, bending low, stared at this stranger.

"I'm blistered!" he growled. "Am I standing on my head, or——"

"Don't get frightened," came the grinning answer. "It's Tom, right enough. I'm glad we've met, for it proves my disguise to be good. Not one of the men recognized me, and I gave 'em every chance; even Andrews was hoodwinked. How'll I do?"

Jack could still have been levelled flat with the proverbial feather, for his chum had been absent from the camp exactly a week, and Alfonso with him. It had been given out that they had ridden for Oporto, and they had, in fact, taken the road for that place. But some miles from the camp both had stripped off their uniforms and had donned the dress worn by muleteers, of whom thousands were employed with both British and French armies. Then they had been joined by a faithful servant of Alfonso, one who accompanied him on this campaign, who handed over to the two lads half a dozen native carts, together with their teams of mules.

"He'll stable our horses away on Father's estate," explained Alfonso. "We can stow our uniforms in two of the carts, and then, if we want to change back to ourselves at any time, we have the things near us. Now?"

"Back to the camp," said Tom. "There we pick

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A CLEVER DISGUISE

up four of our fellows who were on the sick list till last week. They've been reported as fit only for light duty, and so, at my suggestion, are to be allowed to continue with the army as drivers. They're trusty fellows, and may be relied on not to give us away to friends or enemies. Back we go, Alfonso."

As bold as brass—for the handkerchief swathed round the brows and the wide sombrero hat were disfiguring and an excellent disguise—the two drove their teams into camp, and bivouacked close to Tom's own regiment. And here they were, on the road, obstructing that same corps, and causing the irate and lofty Jack to bubble over.

"Of all the blessed cheek!" he began to gasp, faintly recognizing Tom. "You gave me an awful start. To think of you being alongside us, giving me lip too. That beats everything. But——what's up?" he demanded in a hoarse whisper, leaning over from his saddle. "What's this disguise for? And why march with the British army?"

Tom waved him away. "Look out," he said hurriedly. "Those muleteers are looking this way. Pretend to row me; threaten me with your whip. I'll sneak away in the usual Spanish manner."

Cunning eyes were, indeed, fixed upon them at that moment. A man amongst a batch of drivers passing with his team just then recognized Jack as the leader of irregulars, one with whom, had that young officer been able to guess it, he had already had dealings. But the scene immediately following

disarmed all suspicion. Jack raged at the man standing near him. His whip went up over his shoulder, and he slashed out fiercely, cleverly missing his friend. As for Tom, he scowled and muttered loudly, while his hand went to an imaginary stiletto.

"Draw your sword and skewer him if he shows fight," shouted a cavalry officer, also a witness of the scene, galloping up now. "Get back to your cart!" he commanded.

Tom slank away, while Jack explained the insolence of the man, getting advice born of long experience.

"They're the biggest set of thieving, murdering rascals I ever set eyes on," declared the officer, "and would knife one as soon as eat a dinner. I never allow 'em to answer. I'm fair and square and kind when things are right, but if there's disobedience, or treachery, or insolence in the air, I go for 'em red-headed, red-headed me boy, and knock the courage clean out of the rascals. I know; I've been on transport duty in this country in the early days of the campaign, and I've learned that firmness, and violence too, sometimes, are necessary."

There was a grin of amusement on Tom's face as he returned to the carts, while the seemingly sleepy eyes of his fellow muleteers twinkled. Whether our hero and his cousin had embarked upon a fool's chase or not it was impossible to say; but this was certain, occupying a false position as they did, where the piercing of their disguise by comrade or enemy

would be equally disastrous to their scheme, they still had everything in their favour. Those men were oysters; not one knew anything. They had taken service with the chief muleteer, he with the bright handkerchief about his head, and that was all. His name? No—that they had not heard. His age? They shrugged their shoulders. What did age matter in a country where time was of no consequence? Then he loved the English? Another shrug. Perhaps; who could say? He had had a fierce altercation with one of their officers that very day.

"A lucky meeting it was, too," declared Tom to his cousin, when they were tucked in their cart that night, secure from eavesdroppers. "Every muleteer with our troops will hear the yarn before to-morrow's finished, and that's just what we want."

"Want?" ejaculated Alfonso, with a lift of the eyebrows.

"Yes, want."

"But—why?"

"Because we've thrashed this matter out, haven't we?"

Alfonso assented, shrugging in his blankets because the habit was too strong for him. "But," he said.

"I'll explain. There are spies about, stealing Wellington's papers and plans."

"Exactly."

"And strangers with the troops are few and far between, and get spotted precious quickly.

"Granted—then?"

"Then the spies are not strangers. They are to be found amongst men accustomed to be with the troops, non-combatants of course; for soldiers don't go in for such dirty business. So one looked round."

"And pitched on the only possible people—muleteers, the scum of the earth," declared Alfonso, with another shrug, which Tom found strangely disconcerting. Who ever heard of a fellow who must needs shrug his shoulders in bed and in the darkness?

"Drop that shrugging," he growled. "Upsets me. Well, there we are. We pitched on muleteers. To watch 'em properly we decided to join them ourselves."

"And here we are—not that I grumble," said Alfonso, beginning another shrug and arresting it as Tom kicked savagely. "But rations might be more plentiful. Still, as you say, here we are; and here we stay, I suppose."

"Till things turn up. I'm going to let it get about that we're discontented beggars. If there's a gang about, we may be invited to join. Who knows, through such a gang we might get hold of that fellow who captured your father and mine?"

"José, eh?" asked his cousin.

"Perhaps."

"In any case the rascal we were after in Oporto, whose spy we captured going to Ciudad Rodrigo. That's the puzzle. We agree that it was he who

abducted our parents. But is he also José, and if so, or the reverse, is he associated with the ruffians who have been robbing the dispatch box of his lordship, the leader of this army?"

There the puzzle was laid out in all its bareness and meagreness. There were links missing in the chain of flimsy evidence; but this was certain, both lads had lost a father while José was in the country.

"Heigho! We'll leave the matter and get to roost," sighed Tom, for driving a team of fractious mules is no light task. "Things are going well, that's all. Something'll turn up presently."

He was a cheery, optimistic young fellow, and soon dropped asleep; for worry was of no use to our hero. The following day found him just as cheerfully helping the British army in his new and humbler way to advance to conquest. For Madrid was the goal; those three victories had, in fact, opened up the heart of Andalusia. Ciudad Rodrigo and its capture against strenuous difficulties had shown the French that we were out for business, and the fall of Badajoz had set a laurel about the brows of the British regiments. None doubted now that even when skill did not count, bull-dog courage was one of their cherished possessions. Moreover, Salamanca had cast a shade over the French invaders of the Peninsula. Almarez, and the destruction of those forts, the bridge, and the vast stores of the enemy were but an incident, if one of utmost importance, in this third victory; that week of crafty manœuvring near the road to Ciudad

Rodrigo, with its attendant little actions and skirmishes, but a forecast of what was to follow. It was the stand-up fight in the open, when British troops had been exposed to veterans of France, led by noted strategists, when our brave fellows had smashed the power of Marmont—and by manœuvres vieing his in skill—that helped to send the enemy right-about, their faces set in the direction of France itself. The great king of Spain fled his capital. This Joseph, brother of the Great Napoleon, the "Little Corporal", so fond of placing members of his own family on the thrones of Europe, had departed in haste from Madrid, while Soult marched to join hands with Suchet. There was evidence that the enemy were less assured than formerly. There was a decided inclination for forces to co-operate; for the lesson Salamanca had taught was salutary. The British troops were worthy of a greater respect than had hitherto been accorded.

And so for a while we may leave Wellington and his army, satisfied that the conduct of affairs would be always careful. Our interest turns naturally to Tom, sleeping then beside his cousin.

For three days they continued to march with the troops, and each succeeding one found them better acquainted with their fellow muleteers, and already earning the reputation of being discontented fellows.

"Then you find fault with the work?" asked a bulky, stiff-necked Spaniard, with pock-marked face, who had once before accosted Tom. He it was, in

fact, who had so cunningly watched the altercation between our hero and Jack Barwood.

"The work? That is good enough as work goes, friend," Tom answered sulkily; "but had I my way I would be back there at home lolling away my time. Who wants to work, and for these British? And then, think of the pittance we earn."

Tom was romancing with a vengeance, for if anyone liked work it was he. To be idle with him, as with the majority of decent fellows, was to be supremely miserable. As for the pay, a British army has the reputation of being liberal, and Wellington's was no exception.

"Ah!" exclaimed the bull-necked fellow, leering cunningly at Tom, and expectorating to a distance. "The British! I hate them as I hate the French. But as for pay, there are ways of getting rich even when one is only a muleteer."

Tom pricked up his ears instantly. He had taken note of this thick-necked, stumpy fellow before, he with the pock-mark face, a face which even if it had not been marred by disease would still have been the reverse of attractive.

"Getting rich? How?" he asked.

"Ah! That's telling. But there are ways, easy ways, ways unknown to the others."

"And there is good money in it, my friend?"

"Doubloons in plenty, I tell you," came the slow answer, while the man looked about him craftily.

"Come to my wagon," said Tom, at once, anxious

to allay any suspicions, and prepared to lead the man on. For here might be something in the nature of a clue. "I have a friend there who also would make money, if it is to be made readily. There is danger?"

"Poof! Who thinks of danger when there is gold?" exclaimed the man loftily, though the flicker about his eyes belied his vaunted courage. "I will come gladly. You have a bottle of wine, perhaps. That would be interesting."

Tom had a bottle of excellent stuff, as a matter of fact, and had obtained it with a view to a possible meeting of this sort. And, after all, the offer of a good glass of wine on a campaign such as that of the Peninsula was often more binding than a greater service. It followed that, within ten minutes, the three, this muleteer, Tom, and his cousin, were as bosom comrades, while before the fellow left he had made a cunning appointment.

"Listen," he said, staring about him. "To-morrow we come to the city of Madrid. There I have friends, and you will meet them. I will give you the time and place of meeting. There you shall learn how money can be earned, and with such a spice of adventure about it that you will be charmed. Look for me to-morrow, then."

"On the track at last," murmured Alfonso breathlessly when the man was gone. "You think he is one of the gang, Tom?"

"Certain. Can't say, of course, that he has had anything to do with Wellington's papers; but I

guess that's the case. However, we shall soon know that. Still, this is equally certain: whatever this work may be, and spying has something to do with it, it's the merest toss-up that it can have any connection with our governors. Oporto's a long cry from Madrid; Badajoz ain't much nearer."

Late on the following evening the troops reached the outskirts of Madrid, where Tom and his cousin parked their carts and secured their mules in the mule lines.

"You will look after things while we are gone," said Tom, addressing one of the men with them. "We have information which takes us into the city to-night perhaps. That information might possibly keep us absent from the camp for some days, so do not be alarmed if we do not return. Carry on as if we were still present."

An hour later the rascally-looking muleteer put in an appearance, and promptly cast his eyes upon the bottle of wine nestling in a corner of Tom's cart.

"A fine evening, one on which you will pave the way to a fortune," he leered. "But hot, infamously hot; these August days are always sultry in this country."

Tom poured him out a glass, and watched with feelings of loathing as the fellow gulped down the fluid. He was a scoundrel, of that he was sure, a thick-headed scoundrel to be so easily duped. For here he was about to introduce two comrades, of whom he had but little knowledge, to a group of

conspirators perhaps, and in any case to someone able and willing to pay for work not as a rule performed by muleteers. What was that work?

"Spying—dirty work anyway," our hero growled to himself, for the thing was as foreign to his open-air, straightforward character as it could be. "But for the time being, at least, I'm prepared to be as great a spy and conspirator as any."

"You are free to come?" leered the fellow, looking askance again at the bottle. Tom took the hint and refilled the glass.

"Yes," he said coarsely, handing the wine over.

"To the city?"

"Anywhere where gold is promised."

"And the danger?"

"Pooh! Are we not under fire often?"

"Then come."

"But where? The city is a big place."

"It is; but there are cribs where a man may hide. There we shall find our chief. Young like you, yes, young; but cunning, clever as they make them; keen, yes, sharp as any needle. Where? Ah, that wants telling! You wish for fortune. Then wait for it till the time comes. I am here as a benefactor."

Was he foxing? Was this crafty fellow luring them on? No—a thousand times no. The whole transaction had been so spontaneous.

Tom looked across at Alfonso and found no warning glance in his eyes. His Spanish cousin was as

eager as he; he had no fears of a plot against them.

"Ready then," said Tom, as he felt the dagger beneath his waistcoat and the pistol thrust into the leg of his boot, for he was seated on the shaft of the cart. "We put ourselves in your hands."

"Then come."

Watched by the eyes of the other men who had accompanied them, Tom and his cousin went off with their companion and were soon within the city, for the place had opened on the arrival of the British. Plunging into a side street, they wended their way towards the lower quarters of the city and were soon threading narrow alleys with noisome slums on either hand. Then their guide turned into a doorway and tapped three times sharply. Once more he gave his signal. Scurrying feet were heard. Stairs groaned and squeaked beneath a descending weight. The door was dragged open on rusty hinges.

"Enter—how many?"

"Three."

"Then enter."

Led by the one who had opened the door, and next by the rascally muleteer with whom they had scraped an acquaintance, Tom and his cousin entered the narrow, dark passage They climbed the same groaning, squeaking flight of stairs, and then plunged into a room but dimly lighted. Ten men were present, a full ten, seated about a rickety table.

Who were they? Conspirators? Yes, without

doubt. Was José there? Impossible to say. Then any other they could recognize? No—yes.

Tom's eyes pierced the flimsy disguise of one of the men present. It was the selfsame rascal captured outside Ciudad Rodrigo, whom he had impersonated, a spy then, and one now, one, moreover, whose sharp eyes might easily penetrate his own disguise and bring a hornet's nest about him.

"But it's duty," he murmured softly to himself, as he took a seat. "Wellington's orders must be obeyed. I'm here to unravel a plot and make an end of a set of ruffians who are a nuisance and a danger to my countrymen."

Yes, it was duty. But the risk! Tom and his cousin had still to fathom its depth, had still to face the consequences of this rash visit.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Conspirators' Den

IMAGINE a low-ceilinged room, the whitening long since gone a dull smoke colour, cobwebs in the corner, dust on every angle and ridge, and a floor innocent of scrubbing-brush for many a long day. Imagine an atmosphere charged with pungent smoke from the pipes and cigarettes of ten conspirators, smoke generated by tobacco of the coarsest and foulest. Add to that the nauseating fumes of an oil lamp, trimmed perhaps a month before, flickering, red, and smoky. Then picture the forms and faces of those ten conspirators gathered about a huge, rickety table, forms of small proportion for the most part, slim and lithe as becomes the young man of Spain, but alternated in the case of two at least by the grossest stoutness. Double chins were owned by that more aged couple. Their faces were masked by bushy eyebrow, and fierce moustaches, that curled upwards, while their chins were clad and obscured by black beards of a week's growth. For the rest, they were mostly clean-shaven, hawk-eyed, keen, blinking at the newcomers through the smoke which filled the chamber.

"Welcome!" A solitary voice broke the silence when at length Tom and his companions were seated. But whence it came, from whom, he had no notion. The tones were deep, almost guttural. They might have emanated from the floor or from the smoke-blacked ceiling.

"Welcome! You come in time to do good work. Declare your names, your age, and your parentage. Let one of you stand out before us and speak."

The time had come to brave the whole matter, to risk discovery. Tom rose to his feet from the rickety chair to which he had been invited and stood before the company. He stared across the table, through the gloom, and sought the one who had spoken. But not one of the ten had moved. Not one seemed to have opened his lips. Ah! in the background, sheltered in the angle of the room, was yet another figure. The face leered out at him, one writhing hand concealing the features. Did Tom recognize this fellow even then?

"No," he told himself. "The cunning beggar keeps a hand across his face. But—but I'll swear the voice is familiar, though masked now. Present!" he cried boldly. "We have come for information. We are ready to do good work and to earn a reward better than that paid to humble muleteers."

The figure moved from the angled recess in which it had been hiding. The man or youth—Tom could not guess which—writhed his way across the unwashed floor and halted at the table. One thin,

shivering hand was stretched forward as if to gather warmth from the lamp, which was suddenly dashed to one side and the room plunged into darkness. At that instant vice-like fingers seized our hero by the neck, his legs were cut away from beneath him, while someone, evidently prepared for the occasion, tossed a coil of rope about him and drew it tight. There was the sound of a desperate struggle near at hand. Once Tom was violently kicked, evidently by accident. And then there was stillness; the lamp was set flaring again; the same masked, guttural voice once more was heard.

"Take them away; deal with them according to instructions. See that they are securely bound; let them understand that the end is near. Go."

Tom could still see, though his arms were trussed to his side, while he was otherwise helpless. He fixed his eyes upon that central figure and tried to pierce the disguise, for disguised this leader of the conspirators was. But was it José? He scoffed at the idea. José ringleader of such a group! He had not the pluck for such a venture. Then who? He knew the voice, masked though it was. It had been familiar at some occasion. Where, then? When?"

"Go; take them away. To-morrow deal with them as you have been ordered."

Men lit their cigarettes again. The band gathered once more about the table. There was an air of triumph about them all, something which seemed to say that they had brought about a *coup* and had

been wonderfully clever; as, indeed, they had been. Tom in his young, ambitious heart had fondly imagined that all had been taken in by the disguise which he had affected. But the rascals of whom Lord Wellington had to complain were no ordinary individuals, though, as a rule, they were dressed as muleteers and followed that vocation. There was a clever, subtle brain behind them, and that brain had contrived to discover the plan so carefully formulated by Tom and his cousin. The rascally, leering driver of mules who had brought them to this rendezvous was but a decoy, fooled just as cleverly as they had been. Their coming was expected. Preparations for their capture were completed even before they left the safety of their camp. And now, what was before them?

"Murder, I suppose," thought Tom, repressing a shiver. "That's the sort of thing these fellows go in for. What's the move now? They're bundling us out of the room, but where to is more than I can guess. Keep your pecker up, Alfonso," he called, when the door was shut on them, and they stood in a passage. "It'll all come out right in the end."

"Silence! Pass in here," commanded one of the two ruffians who escorted them. "Not both, but you."

A door was wrenched open, and Tom was flung in, receiving a savage kick from the second of their escort. The door banged, the lock creaked and grated before he picked himself up from the floor.

Then there was more tramping, the wrenching open of a second door, and another crash and bang. The heavy steps of two men came and passed his door. The room beyond, which they had so lately left, was opened. There came to his ears the buzz of many voices. Even the pungent reek of tobacco and lamp smoke smote upon his nostrils, and then there was comparative silence, save for a dull murmur.

"Muzzled! Fooled! Caught finely! In chokey!" groaned Tom, full of bitterness. "And just when we thought things were going so nicely. But let's look round. I'm tied fast by the elbows and thumbs; I can't move my arms, while my legs are free. So much then to the good; it might have been worse."

That was Tom all over—an optimist from the very depths of him. Always ready to look on the bright side of things. A grouser? Never! Life held too many rosy spots for our hero, as it does for all who care to look just an inch below the surface for them. Things could not always run smoothly, that he knew. They never do for anyone. Even kings have their trials and troubles, and why not humble individuals like our hero? It is the man who looks upon the bright side of matters who lives long and enjoys happiness. Unconsciously, perhaps—perhaps also because he was the son of his father, the jovial, stout, and rollicking Septimus, himself an optimist—Tom, too, looked ever upon the rosy side. He was in trouble; why then make the very worst of that fact? Why not try to improve matters? And, being the practical

fellow he was, Tom began to look about him. The gloom gave way after a while. Light from a street lamp, or perhaps it came from a house opposite, flickered into the room, and now that his eyes were accustomed to it he could see his surroundings. There was a window, yes. It was twenty feet from the ground. An easy jump if his limbs were free, a dangerous attempt with his arms fettered. There was a dirty floor and a smoke-blacked ceiling. Not a stick of furniture was present. Yes there was, if blinds are furniture; for there was a blind to the window. It was let down to its full length, and there was the cord. It passed beneath a catch, and——

"My uncle!" gasped Tom, following Jack's pet expression. "There's a serrated surface there, a regular saw, if only I could approach the edge. How's that? Bad. Try again. How's that? Worse. Never say die then. What's the report on this occasion?"

It was good, or fair, or middling, as he changed his position ever so little. Sometimes the edges of the toothed band controlling the length or position of the pulley over which the blind cord ran gripped the strands of rope about his thumbs. Sometimes the latter slid over them as if they were not in existence. Then they gripped again, feebly perhaps, then with a vim there was no denying. Tom grew hot with the effort. Perspiration poured from his forehead. He pressed with even greater fierceness against the toothed edge he had found.

"Through! Thumbs free," he was able to assure

himself after a while. "Those chaps are still at it, gassing and smoking. Now for my elbows. That's a different matter altogether. It's mighty hard to get them down into position, and one isn't sure when they're rubbing."

But it could be done. If he had been successful so far, surely this additional difficulty was not going to discourage him. Tom clenched his teeth and stooped, managing by a gymnastic evolution to bring his fettered elbows against the serrated edge of the blind-cord catch. But the task was irritatingly slow and laborious. He rubbed with all his might, and still the cord held his arms pinioned closely together behind him. However, perseverance was a virtue of which he had quite his fair share, and Tom hated being beaten. Yes, whether in a matter of life and death, as this was, or in the ordinary affairs of life, Tom was a demon for work—a stickler, a fellow who liked to see a thing through and watch it to success. A strand of the cord gave with a little pop. Beads of perspiration burst from pores in his forehead until then untapped, and, welling up, joined the stream already flowing towards the corners of his eyes. Then there came a sound of loud and exultant laughter from the smoke-grimed room occupied by the conspirators. The door burst open, while heavy feet resounded in the passage outside.

"Free! Pulled the cords open. If they try any games with me I'm ready."

He gathered up the fallen strands like lightning,

threw himself into the darkest corner, with his arms held behind his back as if they were still pinioned. while in one hand he gripped his pistol, his stiletto in the other. Nor was he any too soon. A key grated in the lock; the bolt slid back with a rusty creaking. The door itself came open with a bang, admitting half a dozen ruffians, who staggered in one after the other.

One was fat and jowly and unwieldy of body. He brought a rickety chair with him and a lamp, and having thumped the former down in a central position proceeded to mop his reddened face. The others leaned against the dirty walls, surveying their prisoner with satisfied grimaces, while cigarettes protruded from their lips.

"*Señor Inglise*," began one—when the fat man interrupted him.

"*Señor* indeed! Prisoner. Dog of an Englishman!"

"As you will," shrugged the other. "Dog of an Englishman! Here is a test, and our fat friend will carry it out. You are on the staff of Lord Wellington. You know all things; then tell your tale. There is life and liberty for the telling."

"As there was for me outside the walls of Rodrigo," shouted another of the rascals, whom Tom instantly recognized as the spy his men had captured, and whom he had impersonated. "Life and liberty. I took both. Here now is your chance. The tale, and then the open door."

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THE FAT MAN THREATENS TOM

"Or a grave," added the fat man, thrusting his handkerchief away and slowly drawing a pistol. "Mark you, Englishman, we wish you no harm. We ask for very little. What now are the plans of the English lord?"

Tom laughed at them. He rocked from side to side at their questions, but as he did so he wondered whether he ought straightway to shoot the rascal into whose pistol muzzle he looked. It would be so easy. As for the others, pooh! he did not fear them. A blow here, a thrust with his stiletto there, and he would be out of the room. But there was Alfonso. No—the time had not yet come for shooting.

"*Señors*, you choose to joke," he said pleasantly. "What next?"

"For you, nothing after my bullet. For us, the easy task of extracting information from your comrade."

"Ah! There they thought to succeed—never!" Tom told himself, for Alfonso was a strict patriot. "Why ask for this information?" he demanded. "Of what use is it to you?"

Quick as a flash he saw the importance of here and now discovering whether or no this was a gang of conspirators or spies dealing in official secrets, the pests who had already purloined maps and plans from Lord Wellington's dispatch case, rascals, in fact, who traded on the news they were able to sell to the enemy. He noticed glances passing between the men present. The sunken orbits of the fat man

turned from one to another, his jowly cheeks flapping. And then he swung round on Tom.

"You may as well know as not," he said, with an air of impertinent assurance, "for if you speak, and tell this tale, you are one of us. If you decline——"

He levelled his pistol with precision, squinted along the sights till our hero, staring at the rogue, could see his fat cheek at the far end bulging over the butt. And then a podgy finger went to the trigger. It was a nasty feeling, that, distinctly nasty. Tom found himself clinging very hard to his pistol butt. He barely withstood the strong temptation to start to his feet and attack the odious ruffian. Then a smile broke across his face, a smile that seemed to reassure the fat man, while the others, villains undoubtedly, sighed as they were relieved of a strain which even they felt.

"But of course you will speak, and therefore I may tell you who we are," the man in the centre said, leaning forward so that the chair squeaked, while he slowly lowered his weapon. "Know then, Englishman, that we have business with all such matters. To the British we carry plans made by the French. From the British we take similar plans, and pass them to the enemy. Simple, is it not? Unpatriotic! Poof! We must live, and such business is paying. I will tell you. From this Lord Wellington our friend yonder took many documents but a month ago. They now rest in the case of Monsieur the French commander, while we live here in luxury. That is so, comrade?"

The rascal alluded to, none less than the very one whom Tom impersonated at Ciudad Rodrigo, wagged his head knowingly and smiled a smile of triumph.

"It is so; we have papers here to prove it."

"Then it's the gang, and a pretty set of scoundrels they are, to be sure," thought Tom, turning the matter over swiftly. But he wanted to know more, he wanted additional time in which to complete a plan then forming in his head. "But——" he began.

"There is not such a thing as but in our business. We succeed always. Here, supposing we fail with you, and I have the unpleasant task of shooting you, we succeed without a doubt with your comrade. Ah, that stirs you!" gurgled the fat ruffian, hugely enjoying his fancied position of bully.

"That is understood," came Tom's answer, given with easy assurance, though the poor fellow was feeling far from happy. "But I was about to ask, seeing that I am invited to join you, surely you have a leader? Then who is he?"

"The tale, and then you shall see; for of a surety we have a leader. Now, friend Englishman, you have put your own head into this noose, take therefore my advice and escape in the only way possible. Believe me, the part of spy, conspirator, what you like to term it, is easy enough."

"And supposing I know nothing?" It was, after all, only a reasonable suggestion, for the officer in command of a British army, or any other army for the matter of that, is not in the habit of spreading his

plans broadcast, nor is every staff officer of sufficient importance to warrant such confidence. No; such matters are buried secrets, discussed only amongst the highest, often enough known only to those immediately helping the commander. To speak the truth, Tom had his own ideas of the future movements of this Peninsula campaign; but they were his ideas only, discussed with comrades over a camp fire. They were very likely not Wellington's. Once before, too, he had had ideas, ideas imagined for a purpose. He remembered of a sudden how he had rewritten the spy's message to the commander at Ciudad Rodrigo, giving supposed plans of his commanding officer which were likely enough, no doubt, but happened to be merely the result of guesswork. And why not buy freedom here for a while? Why not purchase respite even for a few hours? Yes, even for only a few hours, for in that space of time he could do much.

"I'll speak," he said abruptly, causing the fat man almost to overbalance. "But the tale is a long one. A map will be necessary. I must sketch the plans and write against them."

"Ah! Did I not say that he, a staff officer, must know all?" gurgled the stout wretch. "Did I not prophesy that he would speak? While our leader swore the opposite. Declared he would never open his mouth, even with a pistol grinning at him. Poof! I knew I should succeed. I have that reputation."

He mopped the perspiration from his face, rolled

a cigarette, and lit it with the help of a comrade. "But why not speak now?" he asked suspiciously. "Now, while we are here to listen."

Tom paused a little before answering. It would not do, he guessed, to be too emphatic. "Yes," he began, wrinkling his brows, "I could try, of course. But the thing must be written and sketched some time if it is to be any use to you, so that I should have to tell it all over again. Why not let me do it all at the same time, and add the sketches? Then you will have such complete information that you will be able to command a high price for it."

"Bravo!" called one of the men. "He speaks the truth. Why not as he suggests? We have him securely here. Then give him time. Cut him free now, and leave him to it."

How strange to feel in his heart almost terror at that suggestion, a suggestion which he would have welcomed but ten minutes before. Tom went furiously hot from head to foot, and then felt like an icicle. For to cut him free meant a discovery. That discovery of his severed bonds would rouse suspicion, and even he could hardly hope to persuade these folks to trust him again. "Wait," he called. "Leave me as I am to think. Bring pens and ink and paper when you have them."

"And food in the first place. See you there," cried the fat man, pointing to the fellow Tom had already met, "go for food. Then pass outside the

house and get the writing things. We will go back to a meal; you can join us later.

"After the meal I have a friend to see outside. I will get these things, and then join you as the night gets older."

There was a knowing smile on more than one of the ruffianly faces. The fat man grinned and chortled. "A friend! Hola!" he cried. "And one whose company is better and more entertaining than that of these comrades. Well, well! We have all had friends. When the war is ended, and we have done more business, you will marry the wench, and small blame to you."

They went away at once, banging the door and leaving their prisoner.

The sigh which Tom sighed was of the number one order. It was immense. It heaved his shoulders upward and his ribs outward till he looked like a trussed pigeon. And the perspiration trickling from his forehead showed under what tension he had laboured. For he had passed through a terrible ordeal, one which might easily have overmastered his courage. That grinning pistol was not the worst part of it all, though it was bad enough. There were a hundred fears lurking in his heart. Supposing, for instance, it came to the point where he drew up this sketch, information and plans purely imaginary, conjured up in a somewhat inventive brain, and those plans proved in the end to be actually in a manner similar to those projected by the great Wellington!

Then his name would go down for ever and ever as a traitor, as a coward, as a spy. The word was loathsome to him. Better to be butchered than suffer such a chance.

Then the old optimistic spirit triumphed. "Chance! There wasn't such a thing, for he hadn't yet set his hand to paper, and wouldn't if he could help it. The job's got to be tackled right at once," he told himself; "there's no time for delaying. But one thing's certain: this is the very gang Lord Wellington wishes to discover. For haven't I had proof positive? Then how to haul the whole lot by the heels? Ah, that's a conundrum! Precious queer for a fellow to be sitting in a hole like this, a prisoner, and to wonder how he's going to capture the fellows who have bagged him! Queer, I do think!"

He actually smiled. Tom began to grin at the recollection of his good fortune, for he had had undoubtedly the best of the recent interview. He had, for the time being at any rate, hoodwinked a portion of the gang, and, seeing that the noise in the adjacent room, deafening after the entry of his late visitors, had now subsided into a gentle murmur, why, if noise was any criterion of his fortunes, the conspirators were easy in their minds.

Seated in his corner, Tom began to pass each one of the individuals who composed the gang in review before him. Not that he could remember in detail all those ruffianly countenances; but there were some whose features had left an impression. The two fat

men, for instance, rascals if ever there were any; then half a dozen of the others; and lastly, and to the exclusion of the remainder, the one he had taken for leader, the shadowy individual, obviously disguised, with the writhing hand across his mouth and the assumed voice.

"Could that be José? No. The fellow was too short. But—but, awfully like him, that writhing hand. And the voice too?"

Tom scratched his head, a luxury denied him a little earlier. "Bother the chap!" he cried. "Anyway, I hope it won't prove to be that precious cousin. All the better for him and for us when I come to round up this crowd!"

How Jack Barwood would have roared with laughter at him! But let us tell the whole truth. Down in the depths of his own jovial heart of hearts Jack would have been, secretly, just a wee little bit jealous. For what thundering optimism was here!

"The cheek of him!" he would decidedly have exclaimed. "Here's Tom foxing in a corner, with his hands freed when they're supposed to be lashed together. That's, so far as I can see, his only point of advantage. Against that single item he's a prisoner, locked in a room, with a band of cut-throat villains eating their supper beside him. And here he has the amazing cheek to think, and think seriously too, of the time when he'll have captured the lot, to even sympathize with a cousin who may possibly be the leader. Hoo!"

Indignation, amusement, concern for the evident idiocy of his chum would be expressed in his retort had he been there to make one. But he wasn't, more's the pity. And to our hero the amusing, idiotic side of his thoughts, if so you care to term it, was a source of no more than passing interest. He began to check certain matters over on the tips of his fingers. He nodded his head knowingly, and then, of a sudden, he looked up. For the door yonder had opened. Now it banged to with a crash. A step was coming along the passage. A key was thrust into the lock, and presently the man who was to supply him with food, and, later, with writing implements and paper, was pushing his way into his prison. In a moment he would stoop to cut those lashings which now were not in existence. In a moment, in fact, the cat would be out of the bag. Tom braced his muscles for a struggle.

CHAPTER XIX

Tom Thinks Furiously

THE man who had entered Tom's prison, the one whom his irregulars had captured outside Ciudad Rodrigo, and in whose clothes our hero had made his venture into the fortress, pushed the door to with his toe, and, stooping, deposited a wooden tray in the centre of the room, on the identical spot so lately occupied by the rickety and creaking chair of the fat rascal who had been so free with his promises and his pistol.

"Food and drink," he said, as he stood upright. "Ah, I had forgotten the comrade! He, too, perhaps, would care for something. Then I must get the key. Eduardo has it. Yes, that is what I shall do. Then there is the pen and ink and paper, and later——"

"The friend," smiled Tom, watching the fellow like a cat. "The little friend, comrade, whom you will marry when you have made this fortune."

The fellow grinned; he liked the wit of the English staff officer. It flattered his vanity to be chaffed about this little matter of which he was inordinately proud.

Yes, it pleased him distinctly—this prisoner was quite an amiable fellow.

"Ho, ho!" he laughed. "Wait till you are one of us. But, remember, fine feathers make fine birds. You will have no gaudy uniforms. In matters such as this with us it is a case of the man alone. It is personality that tells."

Tom would have laughed at his stupid vanity at another time. But there he was, all strung up for the struggle which he knew to be inevitable, waiting and waiting. And how can a man, or a youth for the matter of that, conjure up an easy smile under such circumstances?

"Yes, it is always the man himself who makes the running," said this fellow. "But I will take food to your comrade, and then for the rest."

He was wool-gathering, this spy. Even spies, we suppose, have their amorous moments and their gentler passions. This man was so taken up with the thought of the outing he was to have that he was actually pulling the door open and leaving without a thought as to the condition of his prisoner. Of what use food and drink when a man's hands were supposed to be fast bound behind him?

The reader can imagine the temptation Tom felt to let him go without a murmur; for then the struggle, inevitable no doubt, would be deferred for a while. He would have a longer breathing space; he would, perhaps, be better prepared in the course of a few minutes.

"Funking, eh?" he asked himself severely. "Wanting to put it off, you brute. Hi!" he called. "Thanks for the food and all that is to follow, but permit me to point out that I am unable to touch it. After all, even were I a four-footed animal, I could hardly manage the task with two of my limbs tied. No doubt the thought of this friend drives such trivial matters out of your head."

A roar escaped the jailer. This was quite the best joke he had come across in many a long day's march. How his comrades would cackle when he told them; for of course he would do that. It would add zest to their chaffing.

"Indeed it is a pretty compliment I am paying a certain person, and so I shall tell her," he giggled. "To think that I who am so careful should go about with my wits so flying. She will smile and be pleased. Hola! Then this is a true sign of my feelings for the minx."

"Quite a decent fellow in some ways, though a traitor," thought Tom, eyeing the fellow narrowly. "Makes one feel rather a sneak to upset this meeting. But then, business comes first, eh? Yes, I'm sorry for him, but it can't be helped."

He staggered to his feet as the man came towards him, still with his hands behind his back. And then he lunged swiftly, catching the jailer neatly between the eyes with a fist the knuckles of which were now hard after months of strenuous campaigning. The man rose bodily from the floor, his feet kicked spas-

modically forward, and in a moment the Spanish hero, the spy and traitor who with his comrades made a living by selling the stolen secrets of those who had come to deliver their country, was crashing upon the floor.

Tom bent over him, a stern look on his face. He was ready for more violence if need be, though not eager. "Stunned, knocked him out with the sort of blow a pugilist would give. That's satisfactory for the moment. Now for the future. Sorry about that girl though. Must tell Jack Barwood and see if he cannot console. Now for Alfonso; but there's a bothering key wanted. Perhaps this one'll fit. Supposing it don't?"

Up went his hand again. The dashing young staff officer, of whom Lord Wellington already had such a high opinion, looked for the moment just like a Spanish churl. For, recollect, he was still dressed as muleteer, and muleteers wear clothing which compares but badly with the smart uniform of an officer of the staff. Besides, he had been somewhat tumbled about of late. But what did it matter? Even had there been anyone to look on, it was too dark to discover details. Not that Tom could not see. Those ruffians who had interviewed him had taken a lamp to the room, and the man who lay sprawling now had brought a candle, only it had gone sprawling too, and lay guttering and almost out at that moment. Tom picked it up and looked about him.

"No use waiting; time's precious," he told himself. "I'll see what can be done with Alfonso's door. Then we'll set things humming."

He took the key from the door of his own prison, and, snatching up the candle, stealthily slipped along the passage. There was a door ten feet down it, and the key slid into the lock. But it refused to turn, causing Tom to groan with vexation. He closely inspected the lock then, and stood considering matters. A roar of laughing and loud voices from the farther room, in which the spies were supping, distracted his attention, and in a moment he was back at his own door. Ah! A streak of light burst its way into the passage. The door was opening. Tom instantly slid into his own room, closed the door gently, and locked it from within. Then, putting the candle in the far corner, on the same wall as the door, he waited events. They followed swiftly; for a minute later there came a thunderous blow upon the door, and then a burst of laughter.

"Ho, there, within! We come to join a comrade at supper, and to bring him better fare than he has been given—open."

It was the voice of the fat man, breathless as if after much effort, a little incoherent, if the truth be told. The laughter was that of men easily roused to merriment, who enjoy a feeble joke, or a saying wanting in wit and point, more thoroughly and longer than it merits. They had been supping, that was the explanation, and conspirators such as these might well

be expected to sup wisely, but too freely perhaps. And here seemed to be an example.

"Open!" bellowed the fat man, shaking the door violently.

"Open!" roared his comrades, lurching against it. "Open and sup with new comrades."

"And the key? Does a prisoner, even if he be about to become a new comrade—does he have the key of his prison given into his care?"

The note of amusement which Tom managed to fling into his voice caught the fancy of these ruffians. They laughed uproariously, so that for a while not one could make his voice heard. And then one suggested that they should beat the door in.

"Aye, beat it in!" gurgled the fat man. "See, I will throw myself against it, and, pish! the thing will fall to the ground."

That put a summary end to the matter, for the fat individual was unable to control his muscles with sufficient precision and dexterity to bring about the attempted movement. He launched his ponderous weight at the door, it is true, but his dive fell short by two feet at least, and, stumbling, he rolled amongst his comrades, bringing about a scene of confusion.

The place rocked with the laughter of men. More than one leaned against the door, shaking it badly. Then there were groans, fat groans, almost in a stifled voice, and coming from the one who seemed to be the ringleader in this piece of mischief. There was more movement and more groaning, then heavy

steps, as if of men carrying a burden. In fact the fat man had been placed *hors de combat.* His own indiscretion and dash had brought about his downfall. A damaged leg caused his overexcited spirits to evaporate into the smoky air of the foul dwelling in which his comrades were supping, while the pain drew a succession of the dreariest of groans from him.

"Done with their invitation for the time being," hoped Tom. "Ah, there goes the door to with a bang! I'll have a look outside and see what has happened."

Gently turning the key, he pulled the door ajar and listened. Not a sound came from the passage, and when his head was thrust out there was not even a glimmer of light to be seen in the direction of the supper room. But there was noise enough. Laughter rose and fell, and was punctuated frequently by the dismal groanings of the man who had been hurt. In fact, it looked as if the gang had settled down for a time, and as if our hero might prosecute his own affairs without interference. He tiptoed along to Alfonso's room and shook the door heavily. But there was no answer from within, not even when he called in as loud a voice as he dared risk. Had he but known it, his cousin lay on the floor over by the far window, still pinioned, as obstinate as any mule, determined to hold no converse with the rascals who had captured him. He was not wanting in spirit, this Spanish cousin of Tom's. As a matter of plain fact, he too had made many and many an effort to

free his limbs. But he had not observed a similar catch existing on his own window, and with which our hero had managed to saw through his own bonds. That was, perhaps, an excellent illustration of the difference existing between the two young fellows. Alfonso was a gallant officer, and had proved himself possessed of ample courage on many an occasion. He was not brilliant, however, and wanted some of the dash displayed by his English cousin. Perhaps that was the result of his nationality, of his upbringing, of his general life and surroundings until the outbreak of this Peninsula War. But then, had Tom's life and conditions been much different? He had lived his seventeen years in that quaint old house down by the Thames, with its fine mulberry tree spreading wide, leafy branches in front. The peeping into a big office provides no great excitement, nor the seeing there of certain grey-headed clerks who, as was the case at the establishment of Septimus John Clifford & Son, carried out their allotted tasks daily without a hair's variation. There was his school, to be sure; contact there with many a comrade; friendships made and lost and regained; struggles for supremacy in such games as then were practised; and, on occasion, somewhat too frequently as his masters stated flatly, there were contests outside, such as that between Tom and the grocer's lad. That had been our hero's life, quiet and regular enough, as one must admit. But the result was that Tom had a dash and swiftness about him Alfonso would never possess, while here was an

illustration which pointed to his quickness. Alfonso still lay bound by the thumbs and elbows: Tom was free, in the enjoyment of active movement.

"Perhaps he's asleep," he thought, shaking the door again and calling without receiving an answer. "Anyway, I daren't make more noise, and there is nothing about with which I could hope to force the lock. It begins to look as if I'll have to go to those rascals and hold the lot of them up till they produce the key. How'd it do?"

His finger went pensively to his forehead, while he stood in the passage thinking deeply. At the far end the noise in the supper chamber had become even greater. There were shouts as well as laughter now, and once a sudden stamping, as if one of the gang had risen to his feet and was indulging in a *pas seul*, with which to enliven his comrades.

"Let's get along to the farther end and see what's there. Ah, another room! Locked? No, open. No key, though, and the place as dirty as the others."

He lifted the guttering candle overhead and inspected his surroundings. The room was empty, completely stripped of furniture. As a matter of fact the house itself was an empty one which this rascally gang had appropriated, taking full advantage of the times. A raid on neighbouring houses at the moment of the French retreat and the coming of the British had stocked certain of the rooms, while the owner must have been absent, else there would have been enquiries. Then, too, by staring out of the window,

Tom made the discovery that the dwelling was situated at the end of a narrow yard, there being stabling on either hand. It blocked this far end, while opposite there was a low, arched exit leading into one of the minor streets of Madrid.

"Just the sort of crib for such fellows. No one likely to come into the yard unless they had actual business here; and since these troubles started I expect few have been able to keep horses. The French cavalry, of whom there have been thousands swarming through the city, will have snapped up every atom of forage, and made horsekeeping an expensive and impossible thing for most inhabitants. So it's the place of all others for such a gang. Perhaps it'll suit me just as well too. Now I wonder."

Stretching his head out of the narrow window he looked thoughtfully about him, and, gazing upward, took stock of the stars, for the clear night sky was thickly sown with them. One of the advantages of campaigning, and commanding an irregular corps undertaking frequent detached duties, was that he had learned to read his direction by the stars, and now a little careful study told him that he was facing south, that the street into which the house looked and the yard actually emptied ran east and west.

"While the bulk of the city's to the north," he told himself. "That'll help once we get out of this hole."

It is to be remarked that he had already decided that escape was not only possible but certain. And he had used the word "we". Tom, in fact, never

even dreamed of leaving Alfonso. Had he done so, he could have dropped from that window and gone clear away. It would be a squeeze to push his somewhat bulky figure through the frame; but it could be done, and below, outside, lay freedom; within lay death. For this gang of spies was not likely to spare a young fellow possessed of some of their secrets, and able to bring soldiers to arrest them. The fact that they had spoken so plainly was proof positive that they considered the two prisoners had no chance of escape, while so little were they in sympathy with the feelings of an Englishman that they, for the most part, had taken it for granted that both Tom and Alfonso would willingly sell any knowledge they happened to have for the sake of security. And the very act of doing so would, of course, make them part and parcel of the gang; for to return to the troops would be impossible.

"No use thinking at all," he grumbled, satisfied with his look out of the window. "Let's get to work. This room's empty, so I'll leave it. Now for the passage again. Ah! Stairs leading downward; others going up. Try those descending first of all."

There was a door at the bottom of the steps leading directly into the big yard. The huge paving stones, littered with unswept rubbish, seemed to call loudly to him, to invite him to come out; for across their surfaces he could step to freedom. Behind, upstairs, lay danger; but a friend, a cousin, lay there also. Clambering up again, Tom was about to ascend to

the floor above his prison, when shouts came from the supper room and sent him darting back to his own. The door hiding those villains swung back with a crash and revealed a scene which, when he came to look more closely at it—for he was now only venturing to peep through the partly opened door of his prison—caused him to stare at the members of the gang, whose acquaintance he had so recently made, with eyes which were distinctly startled. What else could one expect with such people, the lowest of the low, traitors to their country, men who made profit out of the misfortunes of the nation, and who stooped even to do a mischief to the very people who had come at such risk, and at such cost in blood and money, to help the Spanish against the French? These ruffians had been making merry without a doubt. Secure in their retreat—for the house was so isolated and shut in that even their shouts and ribald laughter were hardly likely to attract attention from outsiders—they had been supping liberally, and the red wine of Spain had been flowing. The view through the open door discovered three of the wretches dancing hilariously with unsteady feet, while beyond them, separated by the table, on which stood a smoky lamp, was the fat individual who had been so free with his pistol. His ungainly cheeks hung flabbily. His pig-like eyes were hardly visible, while his lips were blown outward at every expiration. Nor had he ceased groaning. Evidently he found the chair in which he had been placed little to his liking, or he may have been

more severely injured than Tom thought. In any case his wrinkled forehead, his sallow cheeks, and his anxious eyes showed that he was suffering.

But what cared the others? Not a jot. Those three danced right merrily, more than once being on the eve of upsetting the injured man. Comrades sprawled across the table, their heads buried in their hands, evidently sunk in sleep, while the picture was completed in so far as the contents of the room went, or so much of them as Tom could see, by a couple of the fellows sprawled motionless on the floor. Obviously it was not any of these who had caused the commotion. The centre of the scene, in fact, was occupied by two men half in and half out of the door, past whose figures Tom squinted to see the interior. One still clung to the latch, reeling unsteadily, while the other leaned against the post. It was clear that there had been an altercation between them, and as a matter of fact they had risen to go outside and fight the matter out. But Spanish tempers are quick and fiery. Shouts of anger came from both, while the man clinging to the door already had his stiletto drawn. Indeed Tom had hardly taken in all these particulars when the two threw themselves at one another like tigers, and, gripping wherever they could, fell to the ground, and there rolled from side to side as they struggled. Gasps and cries of hatred escaped them both, and then a shriek silenced every other sound within the building. It even stirred Alfonso to movement. He came to his door and

beat his shoulders against it, for that shriek sent a horrible chill through him.

"It may be Tom they're murdering," he told himself, with a gasp.

But Tom was merely an onlooker, a horrified one, to be sure. That shriek told a tale there was no mistaking. Suddenly one of the men seemed to become flabby. The hand which had gripped his opponent's neck fell to the floor with a hollow bump. Then his head sank backward. The victor rose with difficulty, stood looking down at his victim, and, having wiped his stiletto on the tail of his coat, staggered back into the supper room and banged the door behind him. There was a hush about the building after that. Maybe those of the conspirators still able to understand were as disturbed as Tom at the occurrence. But we hardly think so. Quarrels were frequent enough; bloodletting was a common occupation.

"Well, they're brutes, the whole lot of 'em, that's true," Tom told himself; "and it seems to me that the majority are in such a condition that they are hardly likely to discover what's happening. I'll wait a little, and then just go tooth and nail for that door. It would take any one of them five minutes to stir his drunken wits, and by then the thing'll be open and Alfonso out. But that's not all that I want. My orders were to discover the gang and apprehend them. That's clear; so the job's not finished with Alfonso's release."

He went out into the passage boldly and slid along to the door of the supper room. A feeble groan came to his ears. That was the fat man —snores caused the air to vibrate. No doubt the rascals sprawling on the table and beneath it were responsible. But of talking there was none. As for the man on the floor, he was dead. Tom leaned over him and listened; there was not so much as the whisper of a breath. He ran his hands over the man's face, down his clothing, to his belt. The sheath of his drawn stiletto was there, and a pistol also. There was nothing more, nothing. Yes, there was something: Tom gripped it. It was a key thrust into the belt. He tore it out as if his life depended on his haste, and went racing down the passage. It fitted. The lock of Alfonso's room turned. The door swung open widely.

"Come swiftly," whispered Tom, darting in and proceeding at once to cut Alfonso's bonds with the blade of a knife he always carried.

"But—how have you done it? How long have you been free? Who helped you?" gasped his cousin, firing off a string of questions in a deep whisper. "Those brutes, where are they? I heard them fighting or drinking."

"Hush! We'll talk the thing over later. Come to the window and look out. Now, there is the courtyard at the bottom of which this house is situated. When you reach the street, turn sharp left and run to the camp. Bring men back with

you. Bring any soldiers you can come upon. It is hardly nine yet, and there will be plenty about. Also there is a bright, harvest moon, and that makes matters easier. Surround this house. Guard every outlet, and then we shall have the lot of these fellows. Alfonso, this is the very gang we are after."

He took the still astonished Alfonso by the shoulders and pushed him out of the room and down the stairs into the yard.

"But you, you, Tom? What happens? You stay? Why?"

"Go quickly; this is a great chance. Go at once."

Tom turned abruptly and entered the house again, while his cousin, knowing him by this time, and having already learned in the course of service under his command that this young English cousin of his had a way, when thwarted, of giving the curtest orders, darted out into the yard and went racing through it. The one remaining, the young man upon whom the great Lord Wellington had already turned his attention, crept up the stairs again to the passage. He stole softly to the door of the supper room and then back to those stairs leading upward. Ascending them, he reached another landing with a couple of doors leading from it. The flickering candle he bore in his hand showed the dirt and squalor of the place, and showed, moreover, something strange about one of the doors. It was heavily barred outside, while a padlock passed though an eyelet in the bar and made all secure. There were

voices coming from the inside. Did our hero recognize those voices after listening for a while? Then why such extraordinary excitement, the like of which he had not shown before, even in the midst of strenuous adventure? He went red-hot from head to foot and gazed desperately about him. What could have caused this sudden nervousness? Could it be that one of the speakers must be José, the rascally cousin who had already done him such an injury, or could it be possible——?"

Frantic with eagerness he backed against the wall of the passage and then rushed at the door, putting all his strength and weight into the blow. He kicked it desperately. Careless of the commotion he raised, he kicked and kicked and kicked again, till, of a sudden, the door flew open. That moment, too, was the signal for loud shouts from the supper room. A swarm of rascals, roused from their stupor by the noise, came swarming out, and, running down the passage, found two empty prisons to greet them. The sound of breaking timber above reached their ears, and at once they turned to the stairs and raced up them.

CHAPTER XX

A Brilliant Capture

WHILE Tom Clifford, commander of the composite force of Spanish and Portuguese irregulars, staff officer, and as smart a young fellow as served under Wellington's command, listens to the approach of those ruffians who had been such a scourge to our army, and who had traded upon the military plans and secrets of those who had come to aid their country, let us for a few moments anticipate events and narrate what followed the eventful conflict at Salamanca.

Portugal was long ago cleared of the invading French. Now the enemy were sent flying into the heart of Spain, while Wellington could cheerfully cut himself clear of Portugal, feeling sure that the troops in rear would be sufficient to keep open his lines of communication, always an important matter with a general invading a country swarming with enemies. For then, if the worst came to the worst, the retreat lay open.

We find him, then, promptly marching on Madrid, and have told how the troops, with Tom Clifford's command, reached that city. The immediate results

of Salamanca and this march were far-reaching. King Joseph, the usurper thrust upon the Spanish throne by Napoleon, fled the city, ordering Soult and Suchet to come to his help. The former, then at Cadiz, where Sir Rowland Hill opposed him, destroyed his heavy cannon and marched to join Joseph, while Sir Rowland Hill at once proceeded to attach his force to that of Wellington. The latter then set out for Burgos, a most antique city, situated on the highroad to Bayonne, the French retreating steadily before him, looting churches and houses as they went. This movement of the invader towards his own frontier did not declare that he had given up the contest. On the contrary, General Souham, who had now taken over the command of the French in Spain, or did so on 3 October, was making every effort to collect a huge force to oppose us, and, although no serious opposition was offered to our march to Burgos, the clouds were gathering daily, and Wellington had reason to fear that, if he failed to capture this stronghold, he would be left to face overwhelming French odds or to retreat once more on his own base. And, as we have taken the liberty of anticipating events, let us say that, in spite of the utmost gallantry and the most dashing assaults, Burgos resisted, and Wellington who was unprepared for assault, since he had no adequate siege train with him, had to attack the defences. After no fewer than five assaults, a number of sallies by the gallant garrison, and thirty-three days investment, the siege was

abandoned, some 2000 of our men having fallen, while the French had also lost heavily. Nor must we omit to mention the skill and undoubted valour of Colonel du Breton and his men, who here opposed us.

Souham had now collected some 70,000 of all arms, and, therefore, retreat was urgent. That retreat became, indeed, almost a facsimile of the famous retreat of Sir John Moore, though it did not continue so long; for, in spite of every precaution, in spite of wrapping cannon wheels with straw to deaden the sound, the garrison of Burgos got wind of the beginning of the movement. Almost at once French columns were in pursuit, and from that day there were constant conflicts between our rearguard and the enemy. Passing by way of the River Tormes, on his route for the frontier of Portugal, Wellington crossed that river, leaving a thin brigade to hold the bridge at Alba—and a gallant brigade it proved. Pelted with cannon shot, unable to reply save with musketry, this brigade clung to the spot, arresting the pursuit of the enemy till their position was turned by French cavalry crossing the river elsewhere. Then came the passage of the Huebra, accompanied by constant fighting. But the skilful Wellington drew off his troops, though many a poor fellow was left dead or wounded, until at length the frontier of Portugal was reached, and with it winter quarters. Some 9000 men had been lost on the way, while baggage had for the most part fallen into the hands of the enemy.

But let us realize that this was no defeat. There

were some 90,000 Frenchmen now swarming about our retreating column, for every available soldier had been brought up by Souham, who determined once and for all to check the designs of the British. And yet he failed. Wellington had reached security with the bulk of his forces. Thus ended the campaign for the year 1812, only to be resumed again in the spring of 1813, when our armies, still beneath the same conquering hand, were to advance north again, right up to the French frontier, and finally to enter France. Let us also contrast at this point the movements of Wellington's troops with those of Napoleon's men in other fields of conquest. Wellington began that memorable retreat from Burgos on the night of 21 October, 1812, and saw its completion within a few days of the crossing of the Huebra on 18 November. At the very same time Napoleon was also in retreat, that famous and fearful retrograde movement which laid the foundation of his final downfall. Reaching Moscow with his hosts on 14 September, he found the city deserted by its 250,000 inhabitants. His triumphal entry was disturbed by the outbreak of fire, and finally he was driven forth to face an Arctic Russian winter by the destruction of the city. He set his face homeward on 19 October. And later we find him hastening from a field that no longer attracted his attention, just as he had hastened out of Spain soon after the coming of the British. Entering Russia full of confidence, and with nearly a half-

million of men, he bade farewell to those of his generals who still lived on 5 December, leaving behind him a shattered remnant, devoid of discipline, half-frozen and more than half-starved, a rabble still to suffer frightfully at the hands of the dashing Cossacks. Think of the untold misery. Think of the very many thousands of men, all in the flower of manhood, who perished in this Russian campaign. Then recollect that the overpowering ambition of this "Little Corporal", this commoner, this distinguished artillery officer, was chiefly responsible. France needed no larger territory. Honour and glory could have been won for her emperor and her people by this lost energy, this sad loss of young vigour, applied to her own internal affairs, to commerce and other matters. Instead, France wept at the loss of its young manhood and groaned beneath the burden of excessive war taxation, while the years which followed were to see the downfall of the empire which was then being created, the loss of all these provinces won by the sword at the price of the misery and death of thousands and thousands of innocent and would-be peaceful people. Napoleon may have been great—he was, admittedly, a military genius and a man of unsurpassed courage and ambition—but the thousands who went to their doom at his bidding, or who sent thousands of their fellows to their end because of his actions, bear a terrible testimony against him. His deathbed amidst those peaceful surroundings at St. Helena, high up over the

smiling sea, was a glaring contrast to the deathbed of many and many a poor fellow who followed or opposed his fortunes.

But let us turn from a subject such as this to the fortunes of as bright a lad as ever set foot on the Peninsula. We left Tom acting in a manner almost inexplicable. See him now, then, with that door shattered and burst wide open, and himself returned to the head of the stairs up which the rascals from below were rushing. And look at the two who were with him. One, a stout jovial man of medium height, and possessed of ruddy features which showed resolution and energy, stood at his side armed with a length of splintered woodwork. A second, taller perhaps, thin and cadaverous, and of sallow Spanish complexion, stood in rear gripping our hero's stiletto. Both were more or less in rags, and grimed with long confinement in a noisome prison. But in each case fearless eyes looked out through flashing glasses. And down below, coming upward helter-skelter, were a dozen rascals, one bearing a lantern, elbowing one another, firing their weapons haphazard, shouting at the three above them.

"Silence!" Tom commanded at the pitch of his voice. "Silence for a moment. Now, lay down your arms and go back to your room. You are surrounded. You are prisoners. The man who dares to fire another weapon will be taken outside and shot instantly."

Gaping faces looked up at him, and then into the

eyes of their fellows. Two men at the bottom of the stairs turned to run. And then one of the leaders called upon them not to be cowards.

"Surrounded!" he laughed. "He is fooling the lot of us. Hear him call upon us to surrender when we are on the point of chopping him to pieces. Up we go. In a trice we will have the lot of them strung by the necks from the windows."

His pistol belched a charge of flame and shot in Tom's direction, and, missing our hero's head by a narrow margin, swept above the spectacles of his gallant father—for it was Septimus whom he had unearthed from the room behind him, and his uncle Juan also—causing that sedate, business gentleman to duck most violently. It completed its work by crashing into the ceiling and bringing down a yard of material which almost blinded Don Juan as it smashed into pieces. As for Tom, he leaned forward, took steady aim, and sent the rascal tumbling backward with a bullet through his body. He was after him, too, in an instant, beating at those below with the butt of his pistol, while Septimus ably backed up the attack, laying about him vigorously with his piece of splintered boarding. Men dived for their legs, hoping to bring them down in that way, but were met with blows which sent them heeling downward. Shots were fired by the ruffians, and were answered by the howls of the wretches hit by accident. Then a shout of consternation set the whole lot retreating.

What was that? Tom stretched his ears to their

longest and listened. Septimus produced a very red and somewhat soiled silk handkerchief and slowly mopped his streaming forehead. Juan took off his glasses, wiped them thoughtfully, and then gave vent to the expression: "Well, I never!"

"Soldiers! British!" shouted Septimus, beginning to dance from one toe to the other, and presenting a somewhat ludicrous appearance. "Tom, I tell you those are British soldiers!"

"No—Portuguese and Spanish. Listen, that's my adjutant, Ensign John Barwood."

Up through the windows of the house came the curt commands of an officer, commands issued in a language neither Spanish nor Portuguese, but a species of patois made more hideous by the obvious English accent of the officer.

"Recover arms! Ground arms! Split up by sections. Shoot any man who comes from the house and refuses to surrender. Andrews and Howeley take charge each of a section. Ensign Alfonso is at the rear and guards the place in that quarter."

"Hooray!" bellowed Tom, racing down the stairs and to the window of his late prison. "Jack, ahoy! Pass a few files into the house for our protection. I've got the two we've been searching for. Pass the news to Alfonso. His father's here, safe and sound. And mind you, don't let one of those beggars escape. Seize or shoot them all. Search their clothing and send a couple of men at once to help me to search for papers."

The minutes which passed after that were somewhat strenuous. Every exit from the house was guarded, and when a man dropped from one of the windows, and refused to halt at the command of one of Jack's parties, there came the snap of a musket, followed by a fusillade, for the first shot had missed the mark. A piercing shriek echoed through the yard, and when Tom craned his neck out of the window there was one of the rascals stretched still and stark on his face.

By now the irregulars were pouring into the house, their bayonets fixed in readiness for trouble. They found the bulk of the conspirators crouching in their supper room amid the litter of bottles and glasses, while in their centre, looking still more woeful and downcast, was the fat man who had been injured. He was carried below after being searched, while the rest were mustered together, thoroughly searched, and then marched into the yard, where they were put under a guard. Then began a complete and thorough investigation of the premises. Documents and papers were dragged from hiding places, and as the night wore on towards early morning Tom was able, with the help of his friends, to unravel the whole mystery.

"The same handwriting," he repeated on many an occasion, turning over some new document. "Plans of Badajoz as regarrisoned and defended by the British. Ditto of Ciudad Rodrigo, showing that these men have had agents in both places. Details here of

Wellington's forces, with the exact number of guns, their calibre, &c."

"And here the same of the French," sang out Alfonso, now an interested spectator. "Double-dealing individuals, evidently."

"I'll eat my hat if that writing isn't the same as that found in the house where your father and uncle were living," suddenly interrupted Jack.

"Right—I've seen that all along. It goes to prove that the ringleader all through who managed this gang also abducted those two. Who was he?"

"That is a question beyond me," declared Septimus, leaning over his son's shoulder. "We never saw a leader. He was never referred to in our presence. We were suddenly set upon and bound and gagged. That same night we began the journey to Badajoz. Then came the siege, the assault, and our flight; that is to say, we were hustled away from the fortress. And here you are, Tom. 'Pon my word, how you do turn up!"

"Like the usual bad penny," grinned Jack, whereat Tom made a slash at him with his own sword, which the young adjutant had placed upon the rickety table.

"But," he said, "how does it happen that you fellows yourselves turned up just in the nick of time? Things were getting decidedly warm for us at the top of those stairs."

"Warm!—Boiling!" gasped Septimus, mopping his forehead at the thought, while Don Juan took off his spectacles and rubbed them.

"Beg pardon, sir, but there's officers ridden into the square," reported Andrews in his stentorian tones, thrusting a head into the room. "They've called for the officer commanding."

"That's you," declared Tom, pointing at Jack. "I'm still a muleteer; haven't rejoined yet."

But the generous Jack wouldn't have that at all. He insisted on Tom's obeying the order.

"This special job's ended," he said. "You've bagged that crowd, and mighty pleased Wellington'll be at the news. As for our arrival, why, your men acting as muleteers got to hear something after you had gone and sent along to me. I brought half a company into the city at once. Alfonso tumbled upon us almost as we were passing the yard, and—here we are, all aliv—o."

It was a strange coincidence that Wellington should be the one on this occasion to turn up unexpectedly also, but at a moment which could only be called opportune. He and his staff had attended a ball given in honour of the arrival of the British, and there he was in the yard when Tom and his friends descended, tall and austere, his slim figure standing out in the moonlight.

"You command this party!" he exclaimed in amazement, as a seeming muleteer drew himself to attention a few paces away and saluted. "You!"

"Yes, sir."

Ah! There was something familiar about the face and the figure. The voice reminded the general

of a young officer he had often had in his thoughts.

"Name?" he asked curtly.

"Lieutenant Tom Clifford, sir, in disguise. I have to report that the mission on which you sent me has been successfully carried out. With the help of my comrades I have captured or killed every member of a gang dealing in military secrets. There is abundance of documentary evidence to convict them."

"Ah, that is news! And their leader?"

"Over there, sir," explained Jack, who stood at attention beside our hero.

The whole party crossed the yard to the far corner, where lay the body of the man who had attempted to escape, and who had been shot down in the act. A torch was produced, and the light enabled them to see the features.

"The prisoners have admitted that he was their leader," said Jack.

It was José. Tom turned away with a feeling of sickness. After all, it was not pleasant to think that a cousin could have been such a rascal. There, in fact, was the end of all his scheming, all his meanness and jealousy.

"You will report to-morrow at headquarters, Mr. Clifford. I offer you and your officers and men the heartiest thanks—good morning!"

Wellington was gone. Tom watched the gilt of his epaulettes shining as he went through the archway; then he turned. Jack was standing stiffly at

attention behind him. Septimus was rushing forward with outstretched hand.

"Congratulations, sir," gasped the ensign.

"To both of you," cried Septimus. "The chief of the staff gave me the news. Tom, you've been gazetted captain for that work at Salamanca, while Jack also gets a step, and Alfonso a mention. Now let's get to supper, or breakfast—which is it?"

There is little more to tell of our friends. In the year which followed, that of 1813, they took the field again with Wellington, having meanwhile passed safely through the retreat from Burgos. Their corps saw service in the complicated battle of Vittoria, where the British were successful. Thence they helped at the capture of San Sebastian, while in October they actually marched into France, having driven the French from Spain altogether. The battle of Nivelle was then fought, Tom's men taking their part. The Nive was crossed after desperate skirmishing, and so the advance of the British force continued. Meanwhile, Napoleon's Russian disaster had set upon him a flood of enemies, all pressing for vengeance. To describe all that happened would need many a chapter; but in the end the power of Napoleon was shattered. He himself abdicated the throne of France, and was exiled to the island of Elba. Thence he escaped, and gathered the flower and manhood of France once more about him. But it was his fate to meet Wellington yet again. On the field of Waterloo that great general, with the help of the Germans,

broke his army to pieces. A fugitive, Napoleon handed himself into the care of the British, and thenceforward was exiled in St. Helena, where, amid the cacti and the ferns, he died peacefully in the truckle bed which had followed him on his campaigns.

For Jack and Tom we have something more to say. The former was a captain at the end of the Peninsula War; Tom a colonel, the youngest in the army. Minus one arm, he looked, if anything, rather more fetching in his uniform than formerly, for he served on the commander-in-chief's staff at home till he retired. Then Jack went also. Cast your eyes back at the house of Septimus John Clifford & Son. It's not so very long ago that the old head of the firm could be seen asleep beneath the shade of that mulberry tree. He was full of years and kindness. A white-haired clerk sat often beside him, a relic of the faithful lot who were there when Tom was a boy. And there were children about, Tom's, for he had left the service and married. Jack Barwood had married Marguerite, and he and his old friend met daily at the office, for they were partners, while Alfonso managed in Oporto.

Thus our tale comes to an end. We take off our hats to Tom and his fellows. They helped to break down the menace which threatened England.

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